



Aerosol Can Management

Division of Waste and Hazardous Substances, Compliance and Permitting Section

What are aerosol cans?

Aerosol cans are commonly known as “spray cans” and are defined as non-refillable receptacles containing a gas compressed, liquefied, or dissolved under pressure, the sole purpose of which is to expel a liquid, paste, or powder, and fitted with a self-closing release device allowing the contents to be ejected by the gas. A wide variety of industries, businesses, governmental agencies, and schools use aerosol cans. Many cleaners, lubricants, paints, solvents, and pesticides are packaged in aerosol cans.

Universal waste is a special designation for certain hazardous wastes that are commonly generated by a variety of businesses. Universal wastes are afforded streamlined regulatory standards appropriate to the hazards they pose in order to ease the burden on the regulated community and encourage proper disposal. Under the Universal Waste Rule (UWR), small and large quantity handlers of universal waste can manage aerosol cans as described in §273.6 of Delaware’s *Regulations Governing Hazardous Waste* (DRGHW).

Households generate aerosol cans; however, commonly generated household waste is exempt from hazardous waste regulation. The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) recommends that households properly dispose of their empty aerosol cans by recycling. For unused or partially full cans, DNREC recommends households take these aerosol cans to household hazardous waste collection event. Visit www.dswa.com to find a collection event.

Environmental Concerns

Aerosol cans contain both the product and a pressurized propellant, both of which may have hazardous characteristics, such as ignitability (e.g., paints or lubricants) or toxicity (e.g., pesticides or chlorinated cleaning products). Additionally, aerosol cans pose an ignitability hazard because they contain highly flammable propellants such as propane and butane. Finally, the pressurized aerosol cans themselves may present a safety hazard under heat and/or pressure if not properly managed once they become a waste.

Determining if Aerosol Cans are Hazardous Waste

The first step in properly managing a waste aerosol can is to determine if the can is a hazardous waste. It is the

responsibility of the generator to make an accurate hazardous waste determination as described in §262.11. It is important to remember that the product in the aerosol can, the can itself, and the gaseous propellant can pose a hazard. If the generator cannot show that all three elements that compose the aerosol can are non-hazardous waste, or if the generator does not desire to make an accurate hazardous waste determination; the aerosol can is assumed to be a hazardous waste.

Once a waste aerosol can is determined to be a hazardous waste, a generator has the two options for managing the waste aerosol can:

- Management as universal waste (Aerosol cans may be intact or may be punctured)
- Management as hazardous waste (For intact aerosol cans only, puncturing is prohibited)

Please be aware that it is **not sufficient** to empty the aerosol can through normal use and dispose of it or manage it as scrap metal. The UWR contains requirements for puncturing, draining, and recycling aerosol cans that are explained in this fact sheet.

Managing Aerosol Cans as Universal Waste

A universal waste handler is either a person [company] that generates universal waste, or the owner/operator of a facility that receives and accumulates universal waste from other universal waste handlers and sends universal waste to other handlers of universal waste or destination facilities.

Generators of hazardous waste aerosol cans can manage both intact aerosol cans and aerosol cans to be punctured, drained and recycled under the UWR. There are several advantages of managing waste aerosol cans under the UWR as opposed to under the hazardous waste regulatory requirements. These advantages include universal waste amounts are not counted towards monthly hazardous waste generator status, longer waste accumulation time periods are provided, and there are reduced recordkeeping, training, and emergency preparedness requirements.

Please know, healthcare facilities generating aerosol can waste, and reverse distributors that meet required criteria, have the option of managing their aerosol can hazardous waste pharmaceuticals as a universal waste under Part 273, or in accordance with Part 266

Subpart P. The [Pharmaceutical Waste Management Guide](#) is available to provide further assistance to healthcare facilities.

The UWR has two categories of universal waste handlers, small quantity and large quantity. Universal waste handlers have the ability to generate larger quantities of universal waste and accumulate these wastes on site for longer periods of time than when managed under the hazardous waste requirements.

- A small quantity handler of universal waste (SQHUW) may accumulate less than 5,000 kg (~11,000 lbs) of total universal waste up to one year.
- A large quantity handler of universal waste (LQHUW) is one who accumulates 5,000 kg (~11,000 lbs) or more of total universal waste for periods up to one year.

Handlers of universal waste aerosol cans may perform the following activities as long as each individual aerosol can is not breached and remains intact:

- Sorting aerosol cans by type;
- Mixing intact aerosol cans in one container; and
- Removing actuators to reduce the risk of accidental release.

Requirements for managing hazardous waste aerosol cans as universal waste (SQHUW §273.13(e)/LQHUW §273.33(e)):

- Place cans in containers which are structurally sound to prevent leakage, spills, damage;
- Label each container with the words “Universal Waste-Aerosol Cans,” “Waste Aerosol Cans” or “Used Aerosol Cans;”
- Manage aerosol cans in a way that prevents releases of wastes to the environment;
- Inform employees of the types of universal wastes on site, proper handling, and emergency procedures;
- Waste aerosol cans cannot be accumulated on-site for longer than a year;
- Maintain an inventory/dating system to demonstrate compliance with the storage time limit;
- Keep universal waste shipment records for a minimum of three years (log, invoice, manifest, bill of lading or other shipping document); and
- If a LQHUW, notify DNREC and obtain an EPA ID number.

Universal waste handlers are exempt from the Land Disposal Restriction (LDR) requirements regarding testing, tracking, and recordkeeping in §268.7, and the storage prohibition in §268.50, as stated in §268.1(f).

Managing Leaking Aerosol Cans

Universal waste aerosol cans that show evidence of leakage must be packaged in a separate closed container or overpacked with absorbents, or immediately punctured and drained in accordance with the requirements discussed below.

Puncturing and Recycling Waste Aerosol Cans

For those desiring to puncture their aerosol cans, collect the liquid contents and then recycle the can as scrap metal, the UWR includes performance requirements to be achieved. Necessary for use, is an aerosol can puncturing device to completely empty aerosol cans of product, capture all released gaseous propellants, and eliminate the danger of can explosion due to heat and/or pressure. Further, the UWR requires universal waste handlers that puncture and drain aerosol cans recycle and manage the punctured aerosol cans in accordance with §273.13(e)(4) and §273.33(e)(4), respectively.

Requirements for puncturing and draining waste aerosol cans (SQHUW §273.13(e)(4)/LQHUW §273.33(e)(4)):

- Use a device specifically designed to safely puncture aerosol cans and contain the residual contents.
- Establish and follow a written procedure detailing how to safely puncture and drain universal waste aerosol cans.
- Ensure that employees are trained on proper procedure.
- Ensure that puncturing is done in a manner designed to prevent fires and to prevent the release of any component of universal waste to the environment.
- Immediately transfer the contents from the waste aerosol can or puncturing device to a compatible container. Commonly, the can puncturing device will attached to a container acceptable for accumulation (e.g., drum).
- Conduct an accurate hazardous waste determination on the contents of the emptied can and manage appropriately.
- Maintain a written procedure to be followed in the event of a spill or a release.
- Provide a spill clean-up kit.
- Promptly clean up all spills and leaks resulting from the management of aerosol cans.

A hazardous waste determination must be made immediately on the drained content of the aerosol cans. If it can be shown that the content is non-hazardous, then the generator may dispose of the liquid waste as solid waste; otherwise it must be disposed of as hazardous waste. Additionally, the can puncturing

device contains a filter, which also requires a hazardous waste determination when spent.

Remember, for all waste determined to be hazardous waste, the generator must (in addition to following all the hazardous waste regulations*):

- Accumulate drained liquid in a container in good condition;
- Keep container closed unless adding or removing waste;
- Label the container with the words “Hazardous Waste;” and a description of its hazard, and
- Count the waste towards the total amount of monthly waste generation for their generator status.

***NOTE:** Depending on generator status, the appropriate regulations in Part 262 of DRGHW must be followed. For example, for small and large quantity generators, satellite and central accumulation area requirements must be met (§§262.15, 262.16, and 262.17).

Managing as Hazardous Waste

For those not desiring to manage hazardous waste aerosol cans as a universal waste, the alternative is management as a hazardous waste. When managed as a hazardous waste, aerosol cans must remain intact. The generator’s hazardous waste generator status (i.e., VSQG, SQG, LQG) determines the regulations under which the waste aerosol cans must be managed while at the generator’s facility.

This fact sheet is a summary provided as a courtesy to businesses. It is not intended as a substitute for 7 DE Admin. Code 1302, Delaware’s *Regulations Governing Hazardous Waste* (DRGHW), Parts 260-266, 268, 273 and 279.

[regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title7/1000/1300/1302/](https://www.regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title7/1000/1300/1302/)



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