

Senate Bill (SB)1158 designated hazardous waste aerosol cans as “universal waste” to reduce regulatory and financial burdens to companies. Before SB 1158, non-empty, discarded aerosol cans had to be treated as hazardous waste. Now, qualified universal waste handlers may conditionally process cans without permit.

What are aerosol cans?

The principle behind aerosol cans has remained unchanged since the 1920s. Two fluids are sealed in a metal can: one is a liquid at room temperature (the product); the other is a liquified gas (the propellant). When the nozzle/valve at the top of the can is depressed, the expansion of the propellant forces the product through a small tube that extends from the bottom of the can to the nozzle.

According to the Consumer Aerosol Products Council, up to 1,500 kinds of products, from asthma inhalers to shaving cream and low cholesterol cooking sprays, are packaged as aerosols.

Are aerosol cans considered hazardous waste?

Aerosol cans are not hazardous waste when emptied of their contents, however, non-empty aerosol cans may be hazardous waste.

Non-empty aerosol cans are commonly discarded for a number of reasons, for instance, a damaged or clogged spray mechanism; exhausted propellant; or the product is no longer needed.

The discarded aerosol can is considered hazardous waste if: (a) it contains pressurized contents that may explode when heated, (b) the propellant is ignitable or toxic, or (c) the



What I can do...

- Ensure that there are no potential ignition sources in the immediate area where aerosol product(s) is/are being used.
- Ensure that product in the aerosol can is used completely.
- Contact EH&S to pick up spent aerosol cans and/or cans that are no longer needed. In the spirit of sustainability, EH&S will recycle the cans.

product itself is ignitable, corrosive, or toxic. Aerosol cans containing paint, pesticides, and degreasers are several examples of materials that are likely to be hazardous when discarded.

Most aerosol cans use a hydrocarbon propellant. While hydrocarbons are less harmful to stratospheric ozone than CFCs or HCFCs, they are very flammable. An aerosol product containing a hydrocarbon propellant can become a fire hazard if sprayed near fire.

Can aerosol cans be placed in regular trash?

Homeowners and small generators of NON-EMPTY aerosol cans are NOT ALLOWED to dispose of the cans in regular trash (solid waste). However, anyone may dispose of EMPTY aerosol cans as solid waste, or recycle empty cans as scrap metal (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 22, § 66266.2(b)(7)).

References

Fact Sheet May 2005 *SB1158 Designates Aerosol Cans as “Universal Waste”* Department of Toxic Substances Control
https://www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/UniversalWaste/upload/HWM_FS_SB1158.pdf