

Formalin Disposal for Schools

August 2011



Solid Waste Program

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Formalin is the most common form of formaldehyde found in schools. It is primarily used to preserve biological specimens and typically consists of 3.7% formaldehyde. Formalin presents some health and safety concerns when handled incorrectly, and presents environmental and legal concerns when disposed incorrectly.

Health and Safety Concerns

Both formalin and formaldehyde are suspected to cause cancer, and should be handled with caution. They are severe respiratory irritants. If you can smell them, you are over the recommended exposure levels. Extra precautions should be taken to prevent children's contact with them due to their higher sensitivity.

Biological specimens are now available in a non-formalin solution. ADEC recommends that schools consider these for future purchases of specimens.

Disposal of Formalin

Disposal of formalin presents a challenge in Alaska, particularly in rural communities. Spent formalin when discarded is a hazardous waste, and care should be taken when disposing of this material to ensure that human health and the environment are protected.

There are products on the market that will neutralize formalin and make it a non-hazardous waste. Neutralization will change the pH of the solution to between 6-9 pH and will dilute the formalin to less than 0.1%. Additional products are available that can convert the neutralized solution into a solid that is safe for landfill disposal. For personal safety, ensure that you comply with procedures and safety information included with the instructions for these products.

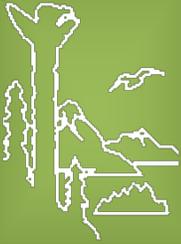
Disposal Options:

- Neutralized and solidified formalin may be disposed in the landfill.
 - Do **NOT** dispose of un-neutralized or un-solidified formalin in the community landfill.



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- For neutralized formalin, contact your local wastewater treatment facility to discuss your disposal options with their facility. Depending on the amount of formalin to be disposed of, neutralized formalin may be allowed for disposal through the wastewater facility.
 - Do **NOT** pour neutralized formalin down the drain without authorization from your wastewater treatment facility. Formalin contains methyl alcohol which is a biocide and could harm the “good” bacteria in your wastewater treatment system.
 - **NEVER** dispose of un-neutralized formalin down the drain.

- For un-neutralized formalin, contact your local landfill to see if they have a household hazardous waste facility that can accept small quantities of hazardous waste. Such facilities will contract with professionals for proper and legal disposal of hazardous waste.

- If none of the other options are available, you should hire a professional hazardous waste contractor to assist with disposal of formalin.

