



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Streamlined Regulations for Universal Waste

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Universal Waste Home

Universal Waste

Universal Waste Regulations

The universal waste regulations streamline collection requirements for certain hazardous wastes in the following categories:

Batteries, Pesticides, Mercury-Containing Thermostats, and Lamps (Mercury-Containing Equipment is Proposed)



State-Specific Universal Waste Regulations

Guidance

The Universal Waste Regulations:

- Ease regulatory burdens on businesses
- Promote proper recycling, treatment, or disposal
- Provide for collection opportunities

Where to Recycle Universal Wastes

Recycling Outreach for Lamps

Quick Reference for Technical Requirements

GENERAL INFORMATION

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Waste-Specific Technical Requirements

[Basic Overview](#)

[State-Specific Regulations for Universal Waste](#)

How does this apply to



States can add different wastes and do not have to include all the federal universal wastes. States can also have more stringent requirements.

- [Businesses](#)
 - [Communities](#)
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Technical Issues

Terms Used

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Federal Universal Wastes are*:

Batteries such as nickel-cadmium (Ni-Cd) and small sealed lead-acid batteries, which are found in many common items in the business and home setting, including electronic equipment, mobile telephones, portable computers, and emergency backup lighting. [Waste-Specific Guidelines and Definition of Batteries](#)



Agricultural pesticides that are recalled under certain conditions and unused pesticides that are collected and managed as part of a waste pesticide collection program. Pesticides may be unwanted for a number of reasons, such as being banned, obsolete, damaged or no longer needed due to changes in cropping patterns or other factors. [Waste-Specific Guidelines and Definition of Pesticides](#)



WHO DO THESE REGULATIONS APPLY TO?

1. Handlers of universal waste

For example, this could be:

- A business that generated (needs to dispose of) a universal waste (fluorescent lights for instance)
- Take-back programs
- Collection programs

There are two types of handlers. Small Quantity Handlers of Universal Waste (SQHUW) that accumulate less than 5,000 kg (11,000 lbs) of universal waste at any one time and Large Quantity

Thermostats which can contain as much as 3 grams of liquid mercury and are located in almost any building, including commercial, industrial, agricultural, community, and household buildings. [Waste-Specific Guidelines and Definition of Thermostats](#)



Lamps which are the bulb or tube portion of electric lighting devices that have a hazardous component. Examples of common universal waste electric lamps include, but are not limited to, fluorescent lights, high intensity discharge, neon, mercury vapor, high pressure sodium, and metal halide lamps. Many used lamps are considered hazardous wastes under RCRA because of the presence of mercury or occasionally lead.

Fact Sheet: *Some Used Lamps Are Universal Wastes*
[Adobe Acrobat \(13 KB\)](#) || [ASCII text file](#)

[Waste-Specific Guidelines and Definition of Lamps](#)

[Outreach effort to increase recycling of universal waste lamps](#)

Mercury-Containing Equipment is proposed as a new universal waste category. Mercury is used in several types of instruments that are common to electric utilities, municipalities, and households. Some of these devices include switches, barometers, meters, temperature gauges, pressure gauges, and sprinkler system contacts.

Fact Sheet: [More Recycling and Reuse Proposed For Electronic Wastes and Mercury-Containing Equipment](#) (Adobe Acrobat 12KB)

[Supporting document for the proposal](#)

* Note, wastes have to be a hazardous waste before they can be classified as a universal waste.

Handlers of Universal Waste (LQHUW) that accumulate 5,000 kg (11,000 lbs) or more of universal waste at any one time. The exemption for conditionally exempt small quantity generators can still apply if your state has that exemption.

2. Transporters

They transport universal waste from handlers to other handlers, destination facilities or foreign destinations.

3. Destination facilities

They recycle, treat, or dispose of universal wastes as hazardous waste (no longer universal waste)

Note: this does not include facilities that only store universal waste since those facilities qualify as a universal waste handler.

[How are the universal waste requirements different from generator requirements?](#)

[For each waste category, what are the specific requirements?](#)

[What are some frequently asked questions about technical issues?](#)

WHAT ARE THE UNIVERSAL WASTE REGULATIONS?

These regulations have streamlined hazardous waste management standards for the federal universal wastes (batteries, pesticides, thermostats, and lamps). The regulations govern the collection and management of these widely generated wastes. This facilitates the environmentally-sound collection and increases the proper recycling or treatment of the universal wastes mentioned above.

These regulations also ease the regulatory burden on retail stores and others that wish to collect or generate these wastes. In addition, they also facilitate programs developed to reduce the quantity of these wastes going to municipal solid waste landfills or combustors. It also assures that the wastes subject to this system will go to appropriate treatment or recycling facilities pursuant to the full hazardous waste regulatory controls.

States can modify the universal waste rule and add additional universal waste in individual state regulations so check with your state for the exact regulations that apply to you.

These regulations are set forth in [40 CFR part 273](#). [EXIT disclaimer ►](#)

Who is affected by these regulations?

Businesses

Small and large businesses that generate hazardous wastes that are in the universal waste categories listed above, can use the more streamlined requirements under the universal waste rule. The Universal Waste Rule eases the regulatory burden on businesses that generate these wastes.

Specifically, it has streamlined requirements for:

- notification,
- labeling,
- marking,
- prohibitions,
- accumulation time limits,
- employee training,
- response to releases,
- offsite shipments,
- tracking,
- exports, and
- transportation.

For example, the rule extends the amount of time that businesses can accumulate these materials on site. It also allows companies to transport them with a common carrier, instead of a hazardous waste transporter, and no longer requires companies to obtain a manifest.

Many industries strongly support these regulations because they have identified easy collection of universal wastes as a priority to ensure sound environmental management. These regulations make it easier for companies to establish collection programs and participate in manufacturer take-back programs required by a number of states. Many large manufacturers and trade associations plan national and regional collection programs for their products.

Businesses that produce less than 100 kilograms (220 lbs) of universal wastes per month have the option of handling their universal wastes under the universal waste regulations or as a Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generator (CESQG) [40 CFR 273.8](#) [EXIT disclaimer ►](#)

Communities

Communities in states that adopt this rule can work with both businesses and residents to

facilitate proper recycling or disposal of universal wastes. By easing the regulatory burden on businesses, more collection sites will be available. Communities can establish collection programs or assist collection programs set up by area businesses.

Households

Universal wastes also are generated by individual households, which are not regulated under RCRA and are allowed to dispose of these wastes in the trash. While new municipal solid waste landfills are designed to handle small amounts of hazardous household wastes, these wastes can be better managed in a designated program for collection or recycling.

EPA encourages residents to take these items to collection sites located at nearby businesses and other centers for proper recycling or disposal.

States may have more stringent requirements, including banning certain wastes from the municipal incinerators and landfills.

This site is designed to provide a collection of federal and state references for users interested in the Universal Waste Rule.

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