

Eye on the Environment for 1-11-15

Batteries Not Included In Your Garbage Can

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*'Tis the season for battery disposal.
Electronic gifts are now immobile
if left on since holidays.
Until new ones are bought, nobody plays.
Rechargeables can prevent this waste,
when disposables are replaced.*

Many gadgets given as gifts for the holidays come with batteries, and when the batteries are used up, they must be properly managed. A report on the web site of the California Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery (CalRecycle) states Californians discard over 507 million batteries per year, and one battery company estimates battery consumption is rising 5.8% annually.

Once discarded, batteries become a hazardous waste, and over time, their hazardous compounds can form toxic leachate, which can contaminate soil and groundwater. For this reason, the State of California does not allow batteries to be disposed in trash.

Batteries are not accepted through curbside recycling programs either, so legislators have mandated large retail outlets which sell rechargeable batteries to implement "take back" programs for those products. To find the recycling location nearest you, call 1-800-8-BATTERY, or visit www.call2recycle.org.

Even batteries inside rechargeable electronic items can be recycled this way. Rechargeable batteries are the power source in cordless products such as power tools, cordless and cellular telephones, camcorders, and portable electronic products. While these batteries can be usually recharged over 1,000 times, they do eventually wear out and contain hazardous materials that should not enter the municipal waste stream.

It is a bit more difficult to recycle button batteries (such as from hearing aids or auto key fobs), long-lasting lithium batteries, or traditional alkaline batteries. In 1996, a Federal law, the Mercury-Containing and Rechargeable Battery Management Act, phased out the use of mercury in alkaline batteries, making them less of an issue when disposed in landfills. However, California still bans all batteries from landfill disposal, and recycling the metal in them is important for the environment.

Large retailers are required to take back rechargeable batteries for recycling, and some voluntarily also accept other types of batteries. Companies wanting to provide a convenience for their employees or customers may purchase a battery collection

container, place it in a breakroom or an area accessible to customers, and pay shipping and recycling costs when it fills. Some churches, synagogues, and other civic-minded organizations also provide drop-off sites. You can order a container that includes prepaid shipping from companies such as Big Green Box at (877) 461-2345 or Battery Solutions at (800) 852-8127. The cost is around \$70, including shipping and recycling, and each container holds about 40 pounds of batteries. Julie Crabbe, Program Director of The Big Green Box, said non-profits are “roughly 10% of our customer base... I’ve had churches tell me they collect donations from parishioners” to fund the cost. However, as noted by Melissa Schaap, Marketing Communications Manager of Battery Solutions, most mail-back battery boxes are purchased by companies complying with laws requiring battery recycling at businesses.

Two recycling facilities and six household hazardous waste collection facilities in Ventura County accept batteries, as well as other items. However, each facility serves limited geographical areas, and periodic collection events at most locations require appointments.

Residents may bring all types of batteries to city or county-sponsored household hazardous waste collection sites or events at no charge. However, public agencies typically pay contractors over \$50 per vehicle to unload, safely handle, pack, ship, and recycle materials brought to the events. Therefore, unless you need to attend one of these events to recycle other household hazardous waste, it saves cities and counties money if you use a different option for recycling your batteries.

The best option, however, is to create less battery waste in the first place. This can be done with rechargeable batteries and devices that do not use batteries.

Just as batteries store limited energy, our planet stores limited natural resources. We can keep our “eye on the environment” and protect those resources by properly managing our batteries.

On the web:

www.call2recycle.org

www.batteryrecycling.com

www.biggreenbox.com

<http://www.epa.gov/epawaste/laws-regs/state/policy/p1104.pdf>

