

Wisconsin Council on Recycling

To: Governor Tony Evers, Members of the State Assembly and State Senate

From: Wisconsin Council on Recycling

Date: December 5, 2023

RE: Battery Recycling and Disposal Legislation

The Council on Recycling recommends that the state of Wisconsin enact legislation to develop a system to provide for the safe disposal and recycling of batteries, and to provide the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources additional funding to educate the general public concerning the risks modern batteries pose to the general public.

The demand for rechargeable batteries has grown significantly in the last several years with devices and vehicles powered by these batteries becoming increasingly more powerful. This growth in both the number of batteries and an increase in power output, comes with a corresponding need to safely manage old batteries and battery-containing device (BCDs).

Batteries pose a danger to the workers in waste and recycling facilities due to electrical discharge, exothermic chemical reactions and sparks that result in fires. Rechargeable batteries have caused frequent fires at landfills, transfer facilities, recycling processing facilities, and in waste and recycling collection trucks with evidence that the main cause of these fires is lithium-ion batteries. Fires at Columbia County's waste facilities in May and June of 2023 caused over \$1 million in damages and is expected to cost of \$12-14 million to replace. Further, the increased frequency of fires caused by lithium batteries is likely to lead to an increase in the cost of insurance for facilities with independent operators, who are less likely to be self-insured, being adversely affected the most.

Most consumers are unaware of the dangers of rechargeable batteries in the waste stream and those who are aware have few convenient and affordable options to divert rechargeable batteries to recycling or proper disposal. Developing reliable, convenient and affordable options to collect, store and transport waste batteries is essential to public safety.

Several options exist for improving collection of batteries and battery-containing devices to reduce the number that end up in trash or recycling bins in Wisconsin. The Council believes that the Governor and the Legislature should consider the following actions:

1. Create and fund an expanded network of battery collection opportunities using a new segregated funding source.
2. Establish an extended producer responsibility program that would require manufacturers of batteries and battery-containing devices to fund collection of the products they sell in Wisconsin.

Adding more battery-containing devices as eligible for manufacturer recycling obligations under E-Cycle Wisconsin, and/or banning such products from landfill and incinerator disposal under s. 287.07 (5), Wis. Stats., while expanding the list of battery types banned from disposal under s. 287.07 (1m), Wis. Stats. (which currently applies only to lead-acid batteries) could begin to address the battery safety issue. However, these actions must be supported by a system to further manage batteries with a corresponding public education effort.

The Council on Recycling believes Wisconsin needs a proactive solution to battery disposal and recycling.

For more information please contact:

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The Wisconsin Council on Recycling, authorized in s. 287.22, Wis. Stats., is a citizens group, appointed by the governor, to advise the governor, Legislature and state agencies on solid waste reduction, recovery and recycling policy. Current members include individuals representing industry, business, non-profit organizations and local units of government.