

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Manufacturers must help recycle used batteries

July 15, 2010

*By Todd Coy and Donald Lees*

**M**ore than 500 million batteries are sold each year in California. Those battery sales mean big profits for battery manufacturers and big disposal costs to taxpayers and consumers — in essence, we have privatized the profit and socialized the costs.

It is estimated that more than 90 percent of alkaline batteries are illegally disposed of in landfills — roughly 30 million pounds a year of batteries containing zinc, steel and other nonrenewable metals. Once thrown in the trash, the batteries become a long-term liability if the landfills leak.

To properly manage disposal of these batteries, California taxpayers and the general public through garbage rates pay up to \$2,500 per ton — as compared to \$30 to \$110 per ton for regular solid waste. That's tens of millions of dollars every year for all batteries sold statewide — money that could be going to our schools and other vital public services.

There is a simple solution to this financial and environmental challenge.

It is called “product stewardship,” the basic notion that a producer be a good steward of their product beyond the sale. This approach ensures that the cost for recycling batteries is included in the product price, and isn't an unfair burden on taxpayers and ratepayers.

The Legislature is now considering Senate Bill 1100 to ensure that manufacturers design, fund and operate product stewardship programs to properly manage batteries. The battery manufacturers (none of whom are manufacturing dry cell batteries in California) are being good stewards of those batteries in Canada and Europe, but are fighting the policy here in California.

This is a proven approach: Europe already has successful programs for collecting household batteries, as do the Canadian provinces of Ontario and British Columbia, whose battery programs started July 1. The same international manufacturers who would be covered under SB1100 pay for, design and operate these programs. The idea is not new to California either. Californians already pay in advance to recycle bottles, tires and some waste electronics. All household batteries have been banned from California landfills since 2006. However, there are very few recycling locations because there is no sustainable private-sector funding source and local governments have limited budgets.

It does not make sense to have the private sector keep all of the profit and shift all of the disposal costs and risks completely onto local governments and taxpayers who have no ability to control those costs.

SB1100 has broad support from waste haulers like Republic Services and Recology and waste managers like the Solid Waste Association of North America, the California Retailers Association, local governments such as the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties, and environmental groups such as the Sierra Club.

In order to invest in expanded operations, battery recycling facilities need regulatory certainty that the millions of pounds of batteries now going to landfills will be collected and recycled. SB1100 provides the means to protect our valuable resources, create new jobs in recycling and save taxpayer money. If you want to help, contact Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and urge him to support SB1100. You can e-mail him at [governor@governor.ca.gov](mailto:governor@governor.ca.gov).

*Todd Coy is executive vice president for Kinsbursky Brothers Inc., a battery recycling company in Orange County. Donald Lees is president of AERC, Inc., a battery and e-waste recycling company in the Bay Area.*

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/07/15/EDMJ1EDRR9.DTL>

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## Who should pay for recycling batteries?

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Friday, July 16, 2010

#### **Do it right, America**

Thanks to Todd Coy and Donald Lees, authors of Thursday's Open Forum, "Cost of Recycling Batteries," we have learned that less than 10 percent of all batteries sold in the United States are properly recycled, with the rest becoming a toxic waste liability foisted on the public.

Most countries in the European Union (as well as Ontario and British Columbia) require that any stores selling batteries must also collect used batteries and properly recycle them.

Thus, not only is recycling infinitely more convenient, but also the costs of such battery recycling programs are then built into the retail prices, with the result that the true costs of recycling are paid by the actual users.

California is considering similar legislation, SB1100.

Come on, America. Time to catch up!

*Ray Perman, Piedmont*

#### **The fair way**

What should be a no-brainer apparently isn't. Yes, battery manufacturers should pay for the recycling of their products, based on sales.

The same holds true for manufacturers of all electronic products - computers, phones, etc.

*Margaret Simpson, Albany*

#### **Our planet**

Of course manufacturers should pay the cost of recycling batteries. In these times of ever-shrinking government revenues and ever-growing expenses, it's unconscionable that any industry would say, "Hey, not our problem." We all share this small blue planet, and we all need to work together to find more sustainable solutions for the future.

*Tim Goncharoff, Santa Cruz*

#### **Take action**

SB1100 is a smart bill. The last thing we want is bigger government and more taxes and fees so governments can grow to collect batteries.

*Robert D'Arcy, Soquel*

## **The real cost**

Yes, manufacturers should pay the costs of recycling batteries. They should include these costs in the price of the batteries so that we consumers pay a price that includes the real costs of using the batteries.

*Richard Watson, Mission Viejo*

## **Local subsidy**

With regard to your question on whether manufacturers should pay the cost of recycling batteries, the better question would be: Should the cost of disposal and recycling of batteries always be the responsibility of local governments? The obvious answer is no.

The cost should be shared by all parties that have a stake in their safe disposal. Manufactures, retailers, product users and local governments have a shared responsibility to see that these materials are handled in a safe and responsible manner. This pertains not only to batteries but also to all potentially hazardous materials.

With a few exceptions, manufacturers that produce hazardous products push the cost of the disposal of those products onto local government. It is in effect a government subsidy to those manufacturers to create toxic materials.

Manufacturers of these hazardous materials need to step up to the plate and take responsibility of the materials they produce. They need to reflect the true cost (including after-life handling) in the price of their product.

*Steve Rodowick, coordinator  
Butte County Recycling, Paradise*

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/07/16/EDKU1EEU9I.DTL#ixzz0trL3CjfO>

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## Comments posted online to the Coy-Lees op-ed

**cal87boy** 9:07 PM on July 15, 2010

What a GREAT idea from Senator Corbett! Taxpayers shouldn't have to pay the costs of cleaning up these batteries that battery manufacturers make. I'm glad to see someone is thinking in Sacramento for once!

**cmthoma** 9:06 PM on July 15, 2010

This is definitely something we need. Make it easy for people to recycle their batteries, and we have less problems down the road with our landfills. Here's to hoping this bill passes!

**eduptaxpayer** 7:07 PM on July 15, 2010

Great article, much needed legislation, let's get it passed! We really need the producers (aka multi-national corporations) of stuff to take responsibility for their products and not act like it is the TAXPAYERS problem and cost when disposal time arrives. Full cycle, full responsibility, full customer service. We have to stop cleaning up the mess for corporations, whether it is massive oils spills or little batteries. Let's see some producer civic and environmental responsibility!

**treehugger\_lulu** 1:31 PM on July 15, 2010

This sounds like a good common sense bill. Let's hope it gets passed.

**FarmGirl2** 10:57 AM on July 15, 2010

We need this bill and others like it. This is the most cost effective way to manage batteries. And let's be clear that it's not going to hurt battery manufacturers. They can recoup the cost in sale price of the batteries. And consumers will pay a little bit more, but they're already paying for it through taxes and it's most likely less expensive to do it this way.

**amtgal** 10:08 AM on July 15, 2010

I am in charge of our church battery collection program to keep them out of the landfill. In 2 years we have collected over 2,500 batteries. We are in the middle of a 2 week collection period now. My understanding is that our county pays to ship them to the battery collection location. I think this is a great bill, but, shouldn't we be focusing on the budget now?

**JStewart2** 9:50 AM on July 15, 2010

Battery recycling helps reduce global warming and ground water pollution, as well as creating California jobs. And the only effective way is to add a tiny amount to the battery cost. Let's do it!

**uxb** 8:55 AM on July 15, 2010

This is a very good idea. We'll see if it passes, and if not, who voted against it.

**SantaClaraCit** 8:50 AM on July 15, 2010

A lot of Cities collect batteries curbside, just place in plastic bag next to the recycling bin. This service (which includes disposal of batteries) drives up the cost of a City's recycling and garbage service. By supporting SB1100 the cost to manage used batteries will shift from the rate payers to the companies that make the batteries. A bill like this puts the responsibility of managing the batteries onto the manufacturer. I support this bill.

**lilsnappa** 8:43 AM on July 15, 2010

This will create jobs, save money, and protect the environment - duh, it's time to pass da bill...especially since we will only see more batteries out there as we move away from fossil fuels towards more electric alternatives.

**Dave\_BNapa** 8:28 AM on July 15, 2010

This makes good sense. When manufacturers become responsible for recycling or disposing of products they make, they'll produce less toxic, more reusable and recyclable stuff in the most cost efficient ways.

**Capitalreo** 8:17 AM on July 15, 2010

Sure the manufacturers should pay for the collection and recycling, but all this really means in a capital market is that it works! The product manufacturers have "externalized" pollution costs onto the taxpayers for too long. This video explains it all: <http://www.ktvu.com/video/24030093/index.html>

**mpala007** 11:26 PM on July 14, 2010

The same thing should apply to mercury containing CFL's!

**overdown** 10:09 PM on July 14, 2010

Absolutely the cost of battery disposal should be front-loaded at the time of purchase and manufacturers be responsible for safe recycling. It is the most logical way to prod ourselves towards environmental good conduct. It is an ecological form of 'pay as you go.'

Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article/comments/view?f=/c/a/2010/07/14/EDMJ1EDRR9.DTL&plckOnPage=2&plckItemsPerPage=10&plckSort=TimeStampDescending#ixzz0trpJlpSL>