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Kickoff held for battery recycling program

By Erick Galindo, Staff Writer
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MONROVIA - Most households in the San Gabriel Valley trash their batteries, despite knowing that it's not only illegal but also the wrong thing to do.

On Thursday, a day before Earth Day, a coalition of community, private and public sector leaders gathered at Digitech Camera Repair in Monrovia to kick off a valley-wide battery recycling program to combat the growing problem.

Since 2006, the State of California has banned disposal of household batteries in the trash. According to CalRecycle, more than 500 million batteries are sold in California annually, but only 0.5 percent are recycled.

Most people in the Valley would adhere to the law if recycling were more convenient, according to a 2010 study by the the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments.

A study conducted of homes here showed that 59 percent of people know that that the garbage is an improper way of disposing of batteries, which contain metals that have the potential to leak from landfills into drinking water. Despite that, only 3 percent of those surveyed properly recycled batteries.

"We found that most people would recycle if they had more information and if it were more convenient," said Heidi Sanborn, executive director of the California Product Stewardship Council. "Most people threw them in the trash because they didn't know where to recycle."

The battery recycling program will do just that, she said. Through a grant funded by the the council,

CalRecycle and SGVCOG, households will now be able to drop off used batteries at more than 30 local businesses.

"You just drop off your battery and the battery producers will cover the cost for shipping and disposal," said Cynthia Kurtz, president and CEO of the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership.

Residents can log on to www.sgvcog.org/batteryrecycling to find the nearest drop-off location. Participating businesses will also display an identifying sticker in their window and place a collection box, provided by SGVCOG, in their store where consumers can properly dispose of non-working batteries.

Proper disposal of batteries is important for many reasons, according to Sanborn.

"After a certain period of time things are going to dissolve," she said. "And these batteries contain metals, heavy metals. Landfills can leak and lead to water contamination."

She also noted that these were metals that were mined out of the ground.

"Mining not only has huge environmental impacts, but people risked their lives to get them," Sanborn said. "Why would we just throw them out?"

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