

Recycling batteries is expensive; San Gabriel Valley cities got a grant to do it

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File photo: A plastic tube contains batteries for recycling inside a Staples store September 29, 2005 in Mount Prospect, Illinois.

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Californians aren't very good at recycling batteries. State law banned batteries in landfills five years ago, but fewer than one-half of 1 percent of them get recycled. There's a new push to change that in the San Gabriel Valley.

More than half the people the valley's Council of Governments surveyed toss dead batteries in the trash, even though about that many people know it's illegal.

John Beberian runs Digitech Camera Repair in Monrovia. He believes his customers want to do the right thing. "I'm getting phone calls almost every day from people asking what they can do so they can put the batteries all together and bring them over to be recycled."

Cities in the San Gabriel Valley sought a \$400,000 grant from the state recycling agency to make battery recycling easier – and to pay for it.

Heidi Sanborn of the nonprofit California Product Stewardship Council says cities spend up to \$2,500 dollars a ton just to send batteries to recycling plants. "They're simply disposal costs. They're not even collection costs."

Sanborn helped cities including Monrovia recruit businesses for the pilot project. Three dozen of them, including Digitech, will have postage-paid collection boxes on display over the next year.

Sanborn lists several reasons most businesses said 'no.' "Some of them are just nervous that they didn't have the staff time to manage the boxes. And others just have corporate rules that the barriers are so high they just can't get over them."

Many of the heavy metals – silver, mercury, nickel cadmium and zinc – in California's waste stream come from batteries. It's still a lot cheaper to landfill a copperside than to throw it away. As the problem grows, e-waste experts like Sanborn say the costs grow too.

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"It's still a lot cheaper to landfill a coppertop than to throw it way." Is that supposed to say "it's a lot cheaper to landfill a coppertop than recycle it"?

Regardless, I take my spent batteries to the LA public libraries or the county libraries for recycling. Simple enough. Are similar programs available at SGV libraries?

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