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Environmental groups press Rayovac for battery recycling

By Catherine Kavanaugh

Thursday, August 1, 2013

Twenty-seven environmental groups have joined forces for a publicity power play aimed at getting battery manufacturer Rayovac to begin taking back their batteries for recycling.

The non-profit group Texas Campaign for the Environmental (TCE) is leading the charge to press the Wisconsin-based company to adopt an extended producer responsibility (EPR) policy. Executive Director Robin Schneider says in May TCE privately requested Rayovac provide recycling for batteries in the United States as it does in Europe.

However, in June the company refused to start a take-back program, according to the TCE. Since then, 26 other recycling and zero-waste advocacy groups across the country have joined the cry for action.

"Rayovac is falling behind their competitors when it comes to battery recycling, and it's past time for them to join these efforts toward sustainability," Schneider said in a statement. "We want them to take back their batteries for recycling, to set meaningful goals for these collections and to support legislation which would create a level playing field for battery recycling. These solutions have worked for electronics and a variety of other products nationwide, and now we want Rayovac to help make it a reality for batteries."

Rayovac is one of the four largest manufacturers of single-use batteries. Its competitors -- Duracell, Energizer and Panasonic -- have all taken steps towards establishing battery take-back programs for consumers. The three companies belong to the Corporation for Battery Recycling. TCE says Rayovac belonged to the group but withdrew.

In an April 2012 Earth Day press release, Rayovac encourages consumers to buy rechargeable batteries because fewer batteries purchased "means less waste deposited in landfills." The company also instructed customers to look for battery retailers that have drop-off programs or hold onto used batteries until a hazardous waste collection event is held.

However, single-use batteries are banned from disposal in California and Europe, and are considered "universal waste" by the U.S. EPA. The waste category is for widely produced, potentially hazardous products that should be kept out of normal disposal streams whenever possible.

TCE says Rayovac also produces rechargeable batteries which are toxic and even more widely banned from disposal.

TCE says it also privately called upon lighting manufacturers Philips, GE and Sylvania to take their products back for recycling because most modern lighting is toxic. Philips and Sylvania also responded with a refusal in June, the group says.

Consumers need responsible solutions for disposal or recycling, according to TCE, which says it plans to bring more groups from around the country together in a widespread, creative campaign to change the companies' policies.

"We are not afraid to take on big companies that are doing too little for the planet," Schneider said in a statement. "We are also excited when we get to move from opposition to cooperation, and we expect that Rayovac and the lighting companies will make changes sooner rather than later. Until then, we intend to

organize support to hold these irresponsible companies accountable."

So far, TCE has been joined by organizations in 11 states.

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