

Legislation to keep batteries out of landfills passes first committee

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April 25, 2022



California Senate District 29

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The Senate Environmental Quality Committee passed legislation on a 5-2 vote to ensure that Californians may easily dispose of expended batteries and products. SB 1215, the Responsible Recycling Battery Act, creates a statewide collection and recycling program for consumer batteries and battery-embedded products.

“Expended batteries contain toxic materials and pose fire risks in waste disposal systems, and yet millions upon millions of batteries continue to be disposed of improperly each year for lack of a unified and efficient statewide framework for properly recycling them,” said Senator Josh Newman (D-Fullerton). “It’s past time to make discarding batteries and the products which contain them easy and free for all Californians. SB 1215 will replace the current, labyrinthine and unsafe process for battery disposal with a safe, convenient, and accessible system for consumers to safely dispose of depleted batteries.”

Because of the hazardous metals and corrosive materials that batteries contain, California classifies batteries as hazardous waste and bans them from solid waste landfills. When improperly discarded, batteries pose serious fire, health and safety hazards that disrupt our waste stream and poison our environment.

SB 1215 will require the producers of batteries and battery-embedded products sold in California to develop, finance, and implement this program in collaboration with CalRecycle to recover and recycle their products.

SB 1215 will head next to Senate Appropriations Committee for a key fiscal vote in mid-May.

This bill is supported by Active San Gabriel Valley, Californians Against Waste, California Product Stewardship Council, California Resource Recovery Association, California State Association of Counties (CSAC), California Waste Haulers Council, Central Contra Costa Sanitary District, City Of Roseville, City Of Thousand Oaks, Clean Water Action, CR&R Inc., Delta Diablo, Environmental Working Group, League of California Cities, Los Angeles County Sanitation Districts, Marin Household Hazardous Waste Facility, Monterey Regional Waste Management District, Napa Recycling & Waste Services, Product Stewardship Institute, RecycleSmart, Republic Services Inc., Resource Recovery Coalition of California, RethinkWaste, Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC), Santa Clara County Recycling and Waste Reduction Commission, Sea Hugger, StopWaste, Urban Counties of California, Western Placer Waste Management Authority (WPWMA), Zero Waste Company and Zero Waste Sonoma.

Mirrored legislation in the Assembly, authored by Assemblywoman Jacqui Irwin, passed out of Assembly Environmental Safety Toxic Materials earlier this month.

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

“Many Californians don’t realize that all batteries are hazardous waste; and that throwing batteries, and products embedded with batteries, in curbside waste bins poses a threat to recycling facilities and human life,” said Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks), author of AB 2440. “With more of our everyday items running off of batteries, it is imperative that we take swift action to stamp out the risk of devastating fires at our waste facilities and safely allow recovery of the valuable minerals inside batteries.”

“The recent increase in improperly disposed batteries has caused a spate of catastrophic fires at recycling facilities, not to mention the waste of all the embedded energy and finite resources that go into making batteries,” said Nick Lapis, Director of Advocacy for Californians Against Waste, a co-sponsor of the bills. “By requiring manufacturers to take responsibility for recovering, redesigning, and recycling their products, AB 2440 and SB 1215 will reduce the environmental impact of producing and disposing of batteries, take a growing financial burden off ratepayers, and protect workers and communities from toxic fires.”

“Our recycling industry has seen significant challenges, especially over the past 4 or 5 years, not only related to COVID-19, but China’s National Sword/Blue Sky policies and the ever turbulent recycled commodities market,” said Doug Kobold, Executive Director of the California Product Stewardship Council, a co-sponsor of the bills. “Even the economic impacts from the great recession of 2008 & 2009 did not pose nearly the threat to the recycling industry that is posed by improperly disposed batteries, especially lithium batteries. Without convenient and effective collection programs for batteries, consumers will continue to dispose of them improperly. This legislation will bring about positive changes to our system, and will help to reduce the uptick in fire events occurring at landfills and material recovery facilities.”

“We collect over 26 tons of batteries each year in RethinkWaste’s region alone, and I fear every day an improperly disposed of battery could result in another catastrophic fire like the one we faced in 2016,” said Joe LaMariana, Executive Director of RethinkWaste, a co-sponsor of the bills. “AB 2440 and SB 1215 will protect our workers and infrastructure from the growing number of batteries and products entering the waste stream on a daily basis.”

“I am proud to coauthor SB 1215 and AB 2440. I have seen firsthand the damage caused by improperly discarded, lithium-ion batteries which can result in serious fire, health, and safety hazards. There has been an alarming number of fires in material recovery facilities, waste collection trucks, and landfills caused by improperly disposed of lithium-ion batteries including the Shoreway Environmental Center in San Carlos. Such fires not only pollute the atmosphere and surrounding community, cause extensive damage to city and county waste collection vehicles, equipment, and facilities, they also endanger the lives of workers who handle consumer waste. The Responsible Recycling Act will ensure that consumers have free access to collection sites while waste disposal workers are kept more safe from these fire prone products,” said Assemblymember Kevin Mullin (D-San Mateo).

“California must do a better job recycling materials and sorting out what ends up in our landfills. Batteries are health and safety hazards for our environment and our workers. That is why I support this bill to provide a convenient and accessible system for consumers to dispose of their batteries. It will prevent fires, protect workers and reduce toxic waste,” said Senator Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont).

“Today, even well-meaning Californians can create dire safety hazards – like the 2016 fire at the San Carlos materials recovery facility – by placing rechargeable batteries into the wrong recycling stream. SB 1215 and AB 2440 will make it easier for Californians to safely recycle used household batteries, including the rechargeable lithium-ion batteries that can explode and ignite fires if they are not disposed of properly. I’m a proud coauthor of this common-sense bill to simplify what is now a confusing, multi-step process for Californians who want to do the right thing with their depleted batteries. Thank you to Senator Newman and Assemblymember Irwin for their leadership on this legislation,” said Senator Josh Becker (D-Peninsula).

“Consumers want to recycle, but we need to make it easier for them to do the right thing,” said Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris (D-Irvine). “By making recycling free and convenient, rechargeable Li-ion batteries will only be delivering energy to our products and no longer a toxic threat to our environment.”

“It is estimated that 65% of California’s waste fires have been sparked by lithium ion batteries. Despite the fact that it is already illegal to dispose of these batteries, their increased use has led to a corresponding increase in their improper disposal, resulting in fires to waste collection vehicles and facilities. California needs to address the issue head on. That is why I

am proud to join Senator Newman and Assemblymember Irwin as a coauthor of the Responsible Battery Recycling Act which will establish a long overdue battery collection and recycling program,” said Senator Bob Archuleta (D-Pico Rivera).

This article was released by the Office of Senator Josh Newman.

2022-04-25