



AB 2440 (Irwin) Better Battery Recycling and Fire Risk Reduction

SUMMARY

AB 2440 would create a safe, convenient, and accessible system for consumers to drop off batteries for proper disposal rather than simply discarding them into the garbage, as is commonplace.

BACKGROUND

In California, batteries are classified as hazardous waste because they contain hazardous metals and corrosive materials that, when improperly discarded, pose serious fire, health, and safety threats. Therefore, all batteries in California cannot be disposed of in curbside garbage bins.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of convenient disposal options in California creating higher levels of toxic batteries are entering the waste stream. This issue is exacerbated with the increased use of batteries in everyday products. Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries present additional challenges as these rechargeable batteries, although they are convenient in the ability to store high energy in small units, can easily overheat and explode.

NEED FOR THE BILL

Data from Resource Recycling Systems estimates that 75% to 92% of Li-ion batteries are discarded improperly and in a recent examination of the workflow of a single MRF (material recovery facility) in California, 11 loose Li-ion batteries were found in the waste stream on average each hour. This not only poses environmental risk, but a fire risk as well.

Fires at MRFs due to batteries are becoming more common and present serious safety threats to Californians. According to a 2018 California Product Stewardship Council survey, 20 of the 26 materials recovery facilities (MRFs) surveyed experienced at least one fire during the previous two years, 65% of which were attributed to discarded batteries. Forty percent of those batteries were identified as Li-ion.

These fires can be deadly and catastrophic. In 2016, a Li-ion battery ignited a fire inside RethinkWaste's MRF in San Carlos. The resulting blaze forced the

facility to close for 90 days and totaled nearly \$8.5 million in damages. Since the fire, RethinkWaste has only been able to secure full insurance coverage through a combination of separate policies with seven companies, resulting in seven times the premium costs. If another fire occurs, RethinkWaste may be unable to secure insurance moving forward, and the prohibitive cost of self-insuring may force the facility to close permanently.

Without dramatically reducing the number of Li-ion batteries entering California's waste stream, we will undoubtedly suffer additional fires that could result in loss of life and will jeopardize California's recycling infrastructure.

THIS BILL

AB 2440 would create a collection and recycling program to more efficiently and effectively collect used batteries and ensure they do not wreak havoc on our waste stream. A more efficient, end-to-end system for batteries offers an opportunity to both keep Californians safe from fires and for the recycling and reuse of the valuable and finite minerals inside the batteries, which will reduce toxic environmental impact while supporting economic growth.

SUPPORT

RethinkWaste (Co-Sponsor)
California Product Stewardship Council (Co-Sponsor)
Californians Against Waste (Co-Sponsor)

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