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Assembly
California Legislature

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June 8, 2018

State Fire Marshal Dennis Mathisen
California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection
1416 9th Street
P.O Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244-2460

Re: Lithium Ion Batteries in Consumer Products

Dear Marshal Mathisen:

I am writing to ask about the management of lithium ion batteries and its impact on California's waste stream. There is substantial evidence of lithium ion battery fires negatively impacting the waste management infrastructure of the State of California, adding costs to waste processing and shutting down critical facilities, leading to other detrimental impacts. I am also writing to other state agencies about waste management processes to better understand the effects of lithium ion batteries on our waste stream. Given your jurisdiction, I would like to ask about related fires throughout California.

The technological advancements and abilities lithium ion batteries provide are beneficial to modern society. However, lithium ion batteries pose a significant fire risk; these batteries have recently resulted in fires at solid waste facilities in California, costing millions of dollars in damage and constituting health and safety threats to employees. With an increasing prevalence of these batteries in products and ultimately in our waste stream, it has become apparent that there is a need for greater clarity regarding the waste management processes that govern what happens with lithium ion batteries at the end of their useful lives.

There are various places that these lithium ion batteries end up in California's waste stream. The existing California Rechargeable Battery Recycling Act [AB 1125 (Pavley), Chapter 572, Statutes of 2005] includes an exemption for rechargeable batteries contained in consumer products, under Public Resources Code § 42453 (b). Some of these products may be captured under the California Electronic Waste (E-Waste) Recovery and Recycling Program [SB 20 (Sher), Chapter 526, Statutes of 2003], but many are ending up in the solid waste stream and creating fire risks. Given the State Fire Marshal's (CAL FIRE) dedication to fire protection, I request responses to the following questions regarding fires caused in solid waste and recycling facilities and waste hauling trucks, likely due to lithium ion batteries in consumer products.

- What data, if any, is available on causes of fires in the state of California?

- If available, to what extent does CAL FIRE track detailed information regarding fires, such as the number, frequency, location, impact, type of facility impacted, cause, level of damage, cost, etc.?

- Is there any information in the data that would illuminate specifically the fire-related impact of rechargeable batteries in recycling and solid waste facilities, in waste vehicles, and in homes and businesses? Additionally, is there any data that correlates this with the increased purchases and consumption of rechargeable batteries?

- Do you have any recommendations for improving data collection on fires in our facilities, vehicles, homes, and businesses?

- Are you aware of any information that would speak to the danger posed to firefighters when they are exposed to these types of incidents?

I look forward to your correspondence and engaging in a robust discussion about the need for safer waste management processes for all lithium ion batteries in California.

Sincerely,

RICHARD BLOOM
Assembly Member, 50th District