



MEDIA RELEASE

BATTERIES BLOW UP IN REGULAR RECYCLING – GOVT’S MUST SET UP SEPARATE SAFE SCHEME

Handheld batteries are a major fire risk in established recycling facilities, and immediate action from governments is needed to remove them and separately recycle them, according to the Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR), the national peak body for the industry.

“As a result of the digital age, battery consumption is going up by about 300% per year and millions of post-consumer batteries are ending up where they don’t belong which causes not only environmental harm but increasingly fires and OH&S risks. No one should lose a business or get hurt due to a wrongly disposed of battery,” Pete Shmigel, ACOR CEO, said.

“Now is the right time for the Federal Government, which is reinvigorated about recycling, to continue its leadership. Federal Ministers Sussan Ley and Trevor Evans, with their State counterparts, can act now for a national battery product stewardship and recycling scheme with manufacturers’ robust participation.

“Only 3% of batteries are recycled here compared to some 70% in Europe where there are long-established, government-mandated schemes in countries like Ukraine and Bulgaria.

“Batteries that wrongly end up in our industry’s established Materials Recovery Facilities for packaging or scrap metal recycling operations are known to explode as a result of heat and pressure from normal operations. We are now consistently experiencing the operational and cost impacts, and should not wait to see somebody hurt.

“There are now batteries in everything from electric toothbrushes to ‘share bikes’ to the average of four digital devices like laptops and handheld screens that each Australian adult owns, as well as the dozens that people store in desk drawers. As a result of ‘wishcycling’, many end up in household kerbside recycling bins where they just should not be.

“Outside of some retailers’ commendable initiatives, there is no alternative, comprehensive and accessible way for Australians to correctly present their used batteries for recycling, and there really needs to be.

“What we have in Australia is not recovery but malarkey. For nearly a decade, there’s been chain-dragging from major battery manufacturers and governments on setting up national programs where all consumers can easily recycle their used batteries, just as they can their computers, TVs and mobile phones.

“Even at the last two Meetings of Environment Ministers over the last 12 months, with this problem completely evident and solutions put forward by the recycling industry and NGOs, there were no substantive decisions taken on battery recycling, and that’s really poor.

“In the meantime, insurance premiums in our industry are known to have increased by five-fold per year in some cases due to increased fire risk. And because we have very limited to no control of batteries coming into our facilities, that’s a totally inappropriate cost shift when producers are not taking appropriate responsibility.

“Analysis by ACOR shows that a national battery recycling scheme would cost less than 1% of a typical battery’s retail price and that seems a very small contribution for manufacturers to make to ensure better environmental and safety outcomes,” Pete Shmigel said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: PETE SHMIGEL 0419 541 531
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