

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Take Charge of Your Batteries

At least twice a year, when it's time to change the clocks, residents and business owners alike hear the message, "Change the batteries in your smoke detectors." While that message is smart and succinct, it does leave us with a question, "I have these batteries; now what do I do with them?" The answer is not so succinct.

Disposal methods of spent or waste batteries really depends on the type of battery that you have, however, there is one thing that needs to happen before you even think of taking them to a disposal facility. All batteries, even those that are spent, have the potential to carry a charge and if the terminals touch each other or other metal, it could cause a spark, emit smoke and potentially start a fire. In fact, there has been an uptick of fires at solid waste facilities and in vehicles hauling solid waste that can mostly be traced back to improper disposal of batteries, especially lithium and lithium ion batteries.

You can prevent this by taping the ends of the batteries or separating them into individual plastic bags which will prevent the poles from connecting. Now that we are clear on storage methods, let's discuss disposal, including recycling. Below we have a short list of everyday batteries and the proper disposal methods for each types.

Alkaline are the standard AA, C and D cells, and 9-volts. Alkaline batteries dated after 1996 are not hazardous and can be disposed of in the regular trash. Manage pre-1996 batteries that may contain mercury the same as button cell batteries. Mercury is banned from being landfilled or incinerated in New Hampshire therefore these batteries must be recycled or disposed of at an authorized facility.

Button Cell batteries are composed of a myriad different elements including mercury, lithium, nickel and zinc. Disposal of these batteries depends on the type that you have because some of the elements are considered hazardous while others are not. The issue is determining the type of button cell you have because they are not universally labelled. NHDES recommends that unless you are clear of the type you have, you should NOT throw them in the trash. Take these to your local transfer station after you have taped them and have the operator assist you in finding the battery collection area. If you have curbside pick-up or do not use your local transfer station, please go to Call2Recycle.org to find the location closest to you with a battery drop box.

Lead-Acid batteries include those used in vehicles, motorcycles, boats and emergency lighting and are banned from disposal in New Hampshire and therefore must be recycled. Most transfer stations, businesses that sell them, and scrap metal locations, take lead-acid batteries for recycle. If you have a

cracked or leaking lead acid battery, place it in a container that is lined with a basic material such as baking soda. Never pour the baking soda on top of the battery.

Lithium batteries (as opposed to Lithium ions) are NOT rechargeable and should **NEVER** be thrown in the trash. Lithium batteries, when exposed to water or damaged in any way, are highly reactive and can ignite causing intense fires. These batteries can be found in just about every device on the market today from toys to electronic devices to even vehicles. They do not all look the same but they are generally labelled as “Lithium” or “Li.” They should be managed either through a battery recycling program such as Call2Recycle.org or as a hazardous waste. These are the **ONLY** advisable options.

Rechargeable batteries including lithium ions contain hazardous heavy metals and cannot be disposed of as solid waste. The good news is that most of these batteries can be recycled for **FREE** at a solid waste facility or participating retailer. For information on the battery recycling program nearest to you, check with your local transfer station or go to Call2Recycle.org.

Keep in mind that the battery types listed above are not the only battery types. If you find something that you need help identifying, please reach out to your local transfer station operator or the NHDES Household Hazardous Waste Coordinator at (603) 271-2047. Business owners should contact the Hazardous Waste Hotline at 1-866-HAZ-WAST for questions regarding batteries that are used at their place of business.

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