

Date of issue: Monday 26 October 2020

For immediate release

CONSUMERS URGED TO JOIN FIGHT AGAINST “ZOMBIE BATTERIES” IN BID TO TACKLE RECYCLING AND WASTE FIRES

Consumers across the UK are today (Monday 26 October) being urged to “join the fight against Zombie batteries” in a bid to tackle the growing number of fires caused by dead batteries which have been thrown away carelessly.

Today, the new national *Take Charge* campaign, jointly founded by the UK’s largest recycling and waste management companies, urges consumers to only recycle dead batteries using specialist battery recycling services, and to never throw batteries away alongside general rubbish or other recycling.

Dead batteries thrown away with other waste and recycling, which the campaign refers to as “zombie batteries”, are likely to be crushed or punctured once the waste is collected and processed. Some battery types in particular, like lithium-ion (Li-ion) and nickel-metal Hydride (NiMH), can ignite or even explode when they’re damaged. Once this happens, the batteries can set fire to other materials present in the waste, like paper, leading to serious incidents in some cases that can put lives at risk.

Although safe to use normally, lithium-ion batteries are most prone to cause fires or explosions if they are not recycled properly. These batteries are most often found in products like laptops, tablets, mobile phones, radio-controlled toys, Bluetooth devices, shavers, electric toothbrushes, power tools, scooters and even e-cigarettes.

The recycling and waste management trade body, the Environmental Services Association (ESA), which launched the campaign, conducts an annual survey of its members to record the proportion of fires occurring at recycling and waste facilities that are known or thought to have been started by lithium-ion batteries in particular.

Data released for the first time today, for the period between April 2019 to March 2020, shows that the proportion of all fires reported at ESA members’ recycling and waste facilities suspected to be caused by lithium-ion batteries alone rose from around a quarter of all fires to more than a third (38%) year on year – equating to around 250 fires started by a li-ion battery during the twelve-month period.

In many cases, however, the precise cause of a fire is never established, so it is likely that batteries are responsible for an even greater proportion of fires at facilities operated by both the private and public sector.

Members of the ESA hope that by encouraging the public to recycle batteries responsibly, it will reduce the number of “zombie batteries” present in general waste and recycling, thereby reducing the number of fires in future.

Executive Director of the Environmental Services Association (ESA), Jacob Hayler said: “Unfortunately, the majority of batteries thrown away in the UK at the moment are not recycled properly. Fires caused by carelessly discarded batteries endanger lives; cause millions of pounds of damage and disrupt waste services. We urge consumers to please recycle batteries responsibly by using battery recycling points in shops and recycling centres, or a separate battery kerbside collection if available.”

Take Charge is backed by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) and supported by a wide range of local councils across the UK.

Mark Andrews, NFCC Waste Fires Lead and Assistant Chief Fire Officer of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, said: “Batteries in household waste and recycling can lead to large scale and protracted fires. These incidents are often very challenging for fire services to deal with and can cause significant disruption to communities. “Many people may not realise the importance of the correct disposal of batteries so this simple advice can make a real difference in preventing waste fires”

Consumers can find out where to recycle batteries responsibly in their area, and more about the dangers of Zombie Batteries, by visiting the campaign website at www.takecharge.org.uk

ENDS

Notes to editors

For media enquiries, please contact Ben Johnson at b-johnson@esauk.org or by phone on **07966 304330**. We would be happy to make a spokesperson available for interviews and will endeavour to facilitate filming requests at ESA members’ facilities across the UK as required.

About the campaign

The *Take Charge+* Campaign was established in October 2020 and is managed by the Environmental Services Association (ESA). It is sponsored by the [ESA](http://www.esa.org.uk) and the battery compliance scheme, European Recycling Platform (ERP).

To find out more about the Take Charge campaign, and see a full list of supporters, please visit www.takecharge.org.uk

A short [campaign film](#) is available and may be shared or embedded for editorial use.

A full set of campaign assets is available to download at www.takecharge.org.uk/downloads - please read the accompanying Fair Usage Guide before sharing or publishing this content.

About battery recycling

- All batteries (except car batteries) should be recycled using battery recycling collection points. These are often found in supermarkets, DIY stores, high-street shops and local household waste recycling centres (HWRCs).
- Around 40% of local councils also offer a kerbside collection for used batteries, but these should always be recycled separately to other materials. Residents should follow local instructions.
- Similarly, batteries should always be removed from waste electricals where possible before they are discarded and waste electrical items should be recycled at a local HWRC or via a kerbside collection if possible. If batteries cannot be removed safely, they should be left in waste electrical devices, and these should be recycled using a waste electricals recycling service.
- All batteries can be recycled, but the current recycling rate for batteries is around 45% of all batteries placed on the market – meaning that 55% are not currently recycled properly.