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Title: Testimony before the Vermont State Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee on H695

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My name is Michael Batcher and I am a regional planner with the Bennington County Regional Commission in Bennington, VT. Thank you for inviting me to offer testimony on H695 this morning. The Bennington County Regional Commission or "BCRC" provides support to the towns of Arlington, Dorset, Glastenbury, Manchester, Pownal, Rupert, Sandgate, Shaftsbury and Sunderland in the implementation of the Solid Waste Implementation Plan or SWIP that they adopted and which was approved by the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources in 2008. The nine towns that adopted that SWIP are responsible for implementation of the programs it outlines, and BCRC assists them in specific areas of implementation.

Probably the most important support we give them is in holding household hazardous waste events. We hold two events each year for Arlington, Dorset, Manchester, Rupert, Sandgate and Sunderland while Shaftsbury holds two events for Shaftsbury, Pownal, Glastenbury and Stamford. These four events have served, on average, about 400 households each year. Last year, the total cost of these events exceeded $60,000, of which approximately $17,000 was from grants from ANR and the Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets.

We have supported product stewardship initiatives including E-Waste, the mercury bulb program and the soon to be implemented paint program because they save our towns money on the costs of disposal of these materials and they provide greater convenience for residents and businesses.

At our household hazardous waste events we take rechargeable batteries as they contain several toxic substances including mercury and because there are only two locations in Bennington County that currently take them. Residents often ask about alkaline batteries and are generally astonished that they can be disposed of in the normal trash. From talking with them, I have gathered that they are often confused and unsure of the appropriate methods of disposal of many items. Undoubtedly, rechargeable batteries are disposed along with alkaline batteries in the trash simply because residents and businesses are not aware of what they should be doing, or they don't have a convenient method of disposal.

Based on recycling cost estimates provided by Jen Holliday of the Vermont Product Stewardship Council, it would cost our nine towns approximately $15,000 to recycle the batteries disposed by residents. This is not a large cost for battery manufacturers, but would be a significant addition to our household hazardous waste costs. So it is unlikely that we will take on the burden of providing this service. In addition, events would not be as effective as providing more convenient ways for consumers to dispose of their batteries.

The key item in the proposed legislation of interest to us is the establishment of a program by which those who purchase alkaline batteries could take them back to retailers for appropriate disposal. We all use batteries in our many devices, and alkaline batteries are much cheaper than rechargeable batteries. Providing a convenient method of disposal would likely encourage consumers to recycle other materials such as their rechargeable batteries. In addition, the materials in the batteries could be harvested and save the cost, energy and other resources of mining and processing of those materials.

I hope these comments have been helpful, and again thank you for inviting me.