



ADDISON COUNTY SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

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WHITING

February 27, 2024

The Honorable Christopher Bray, Chair
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Sent via email to Jude Newman: jnewman@leg.state.vt.us

Re: Testimony on S. 254 – An Act Relating to Including Rechargeable Batteries & Battery-containing Products Under the State Battery Stewardship Program

Dear Chair Bray and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S. 254.

My name is Donald Maglienti and I'm the Program Manager of the Addison County Solid Waste Management District (ACSWMD). The ACSWMD is responsible for assisting our 21 member towns of Addison County with all aspects of solid waste management, including waste reduction, reuse, recycling, disposal and planning. We provide outreach to residents, businesses, and waste haulers on waste reduction and diversion. We also own and operate the District Transfer Station and HazWaste Center in Middlebury. At our Transfer Station, we manage all landfill-bound waste from our member towns as well as more than 27 different waste diversion programs.

Our District has been collecting household batteries for recycling for more than 25 years and, as a founding member of the VT Product Stewardship Council (VTPSC), was an advocate for the passage of Vermont's Primary Battery Stewardship Law (Act 139) in 2014. While this law was the first of its kind in the nation, it only created an extended producer responsibility (EPR) system for primary cell batteries, which consist of non-rechargeable alkaline and carbon zinc batteries that most households previously discarded in the trash. Rechargeable batteries are also being collected for recycling, but only through a voluntary program offered by manufacturers that does not require the same level of financial and management responsibility as a true EPR program.

At our Transfer Station, we currently recycle more than 8 tons of household batteries each year, with rechargeable batteries accounting for roughly half that amount. In the past 10 years, the total annual weight of rechargeable batteries collected has increased by more than 70%. Rechargeable batteries are a rapidly expanding segment of Vermont's waste stream and create unique management challenges and costs for municipalities. Lithium batteries in particular are included in a host of new consumer products each year. When these highly reactive lithium batteries are disposed of in the trash or recycling bin, they increase the risk of dangerous fires and explosions for trash haulers, transfer stations, and recycling processing facilities. A 2023 study from the National Waste & Recycling Association (NWRA) and Resource Recycling

Systems (RRS) estimates that catastrophic losses due to fires at recycling facilities have increased by 41% in the last five years and identified lithium batteries as the primary cause. Recycling facilities mistakenly receive dozens of lithium batteries every day due to public misconceptions about proper disposal. An EPR program that includes all battery types would improve education and outreach and help reduce public confusion about how to properly manage lithium batteries.

Apart from the risk of managing these rechargeable batteries, there is also a growing cost of disposal that is currently borne by municipalities. Two specific categories of rechargeable batteries are especially dangerous and costly to manage: damaged and defective lithium batteries, and high-wattage lithium batteries. Advancements in product technology have resulted in rapidly growing numbers of these types of batteries being delivered to collection facilities, resulting in higher management costs for governments, including our own District. At our facility, we're collecting increasing volumes of lithium batteries from E-cigarettes, hoverboards, battery-powered bicycles, electric scooters, and outdoor power equipment. We also have special fire prevention equipment onsite designed to respond to lithium battery fires.

The solution to the management challenges and costs is to fold all rechargeable batteries into Vermont's existing battery stewardship program. The benefits of doing so include shifting more management responsibilities and costs away from municipalities and toward battery producers, increasing awareness about proper end-of-life management of rechargeable batteries, and providing new incentives to design products and batteries with safety and recyclability in mind.

S. 254 will improve safety while reducing costs for local governments that manage rechargeable batteries. As such, we hope you will agree that this bill is a perfect addition to Vermont's EPR landscape.

Thank you again for providing the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Donald Maglienti
Program Manager
Addison County Solid Waste Management District