

Friday Facts: What About Batteries?

There seems to be a lot of confusion out there about what to do with old household batteries. This is an important topic because household batteries may contain heavy metals such as cadmium, copper, zinc, lead, manganese, nickel, and lithium and may create a hazard when disposed of incorrectly. To answer the question of what you should do with used batteries, first you should know that there are two types of batteries, the regular alkaline kind and the rechargeable kind.



Rechargeable batteries can be easily and readily recycled through any one of a number of programs. One of these programs is the Rechargeable Battery Corporation's (RBRC) national *Call2Recycle* Campaign. Communities and public agencies can sign up for this free program at their website, www.rbrc.org/call2recycle/. Once you have registered as a public agency or community site, you will receive free pre-addressed, freight pre-paid, RBRC collection boxes. Once the collection boxes are full, just seal and drop off at the nearest UPS. Your organization will be placed on an automatic replenishment system so there is no need to contact the RBRC for more boxes after you receive your initial kit. You can also use this site to search for an already established collection site near you. Most Household Hazardous Waste Facilities will also accept rechargeable batteries for recycling.

Unfortunately, disposal for regular alkaline batteries is not as simple. While it is acceptable to dispose of alkaline batteries in lined and monitored municipal solid waste landfills, recycling is a better option. Yes, most Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Facilities accept alkaline batteries. But what happens to them after collection varies depending on the facility. Because it is legally permissible to do so, some HHW facilities simply send batteries to a regular landfill. Other HHW facilities send batteries to a special hazardous waste landfill. And a few programs choose the most expensive option of sending batteries to a recycler where they are pelletized and melted down and the metals are extracted. Through checking with a few HHW programs across the state, we've found the following:

- Sedgwick County does not accept alkaline batteries and advises its citizens to put them in the trash;
- Shawnee County accepts alkaline batteries but sends them to a regular landfill;
- City of Lawrence/ Douglas County accepts alkaline batteries and sends them to a special hazardous waste landfill;
- City of Salina accepts alkaline batteries and sends them to a recycler.

As is usually the case, the best option to start with is to try to *reduce* battery waste. Check to see if you already have batteries on hand before buying more and try to buy electronics that function without batteries. When it is necessary to buy batteries, consider that rechargeable batteries have a longer life span and result in using fewer batteries. But remember that rechargeable batteries also contain heavy metals and should be recycled whenever possible. For more information about recycling and waste reduction, visit www.kansasgreenteams.org.