



Northeast Resource Recovery Association

"Partnering to make recycling strong through economic and environmentally sound solutions"

HB 1386: Prohibiting Disposal of Lithium-Ion Batteries & Electronics

House Environment and Agriculture Committee

February 6, 2024 Hearing

Testimony by Reagan Bissonnette, Executive Director, Northeast Resource Recovery Association

About the Northeast Resource Recovery Association

Founded over 40 years ago, the Northeast Resource Recovery Association (NRRA) is the oldest and largest cooperative-model recycling nonprofit in the United States. NRRA's membership includes 90% of New Hampshire (NH) communities. NRRA is one of only a handful of nonprofits in the country that enables communities to manage their own recycling programs by connecting them with end markets for recyclables. In 2022, NRRA returned nearly \$2.98 million to its members from the sale of their recyclables. That recycling resulted in avoided carbon dioxide emissions equivalent to removing over 20,392 passenger cars from the road for an entire year.

NRRA also participates in the NH Solid Waste Working Group, which was formed to advise the NH Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) on planning for NH's solid waste future.

NRRA Takes No Position on HB 1386

HB 1386 would prohibit the disposal of lithium-ion batteries and electronic devices in landfills and incinerators in NH. NRRA does not take a position on any proposed legislation and therefore takes no position on HB 1386. This testimony will share with the Committee NRRA's experience supporting municipalities with their recycling and waste reduction efforts in NH as it relates to the bill.

HB 1386 is Consistent with the NH Solid Waste Management Plan

NHDES issued its most recent Solid Waste Management Plan¹ in October 2022. The NH Solid Waste Working Group, of which NRRA is a member, provided input on the development of the plan. Most goals and actions in the plan are designed to achieve the state's disposal reduction goal, which is to reduce the disposal of municipal solid waste and construction and demolition debris by 25% by 2030 and by 45% by 2050.

HB 1386 is consistent with Action 2.10 "Explore legislation that would establish waste disposal bans and EPR for items such as rechargeable batteries, electronic devices, paint and sharps."

Lithium-ion Battery Fires are Dangerous and Costly

Lithium-ion batteries are rechargeable batteries found in cell phones, laptops, tablets, and other electronic devices. When lithium-ion batteries are improperly disposed of in the trash instead of recycled, the protective pouch surrounding the battery can easily be punctured by recycling equipment, leading to a chemical reaction that can cause a fire or explosion. Lithium-ion battery fires burn hotter, longer, and are more difficult to extinguish due to the chemical reactions that cause the fire². According to a recent report by the National Waste & Recycling Association³, more than 5,000 fires are estimated to occur annually at recycling facilities nationwide. Lithium-ion batteries are increasingly the cause of such fires.

¹ <https://www.des.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt341/files/documents/r-wmd-22-03.pdf>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/lithium-ion-battery-fires-electric-cars-bikes-scooters-firefighters/>

³ <https://www.wastetodaymagazine.com/news/nwra-rs-report-assesses-fire-risk-to-waste-recycling-infrastructure/>

Lithium-ion battery fires pose safety risks to solid waste facility operators. Refuse and recyclable material collectors are currently ranked in the top ten dangerous jobs in U.S.⁴ The annual cost to the U.S. and Canada due to lithium-ion battery fires is estimated to be more than \$1.2 billion.⁵

Examples of Transfer Station Fires in and Near NH

Fires are becoming increasingly common at solid waste transfer stations in NH, whether municipal or privately owned. A large regional trash and recycling company informed NRRA that it has on average one fire weekly in its trash and recycling trucks. While small fires may not be reported, NRRA is aware of at least five fires known or suspected to be caused by lithium-ion batteries in the past four years in and near NH.

In June 2020, the City of Keene Transfer Station experienced a fire that was suspected to be caused by improperly disposed of material, possibly a lithium-ion battery. A firefighter experienced a back injury while putting out the fire, and the fire caused considerable structural damage to the transfer station.

In January 2021, a recycling nonprofit in Maine called ecomaine had a lithium-ion battery fire. The facility was able to resume operations the next day.

In May 2022, the Lee, NH Transfer Station had an improperly disposed-of lithium battery catch fire.⁶ “Thanks to the quick thinking of the Transfer Station crew today, this situation was handled quickly and safely. Their training was put to good use, and there was no damage to any equipment or the building,” said the Lee NH Public Works Department in a Facebook post. “Again, we got really lucky this was spotted quickly, or the situation could have been much much worse!”

In May 2023, Barlett, NH had a fire caused by an electric bike battery. Transfer station staff were able to quickly contain the fire, resulting in no injuries.

In August 2023, Alva Waste Service in Vermont had a fire in their recycling transfer station, most likely from a lithium-ion battery. Two local fire departments responded to assist staff in putting out the fire. The facility was able to reopen 1.5 hours later.

Resources Available for NH Municipalities

NRRA works with dozens of recycling companies to help municipalities in NH find end markets for their recycling programs, including battery and electronics recycling vendors. There are several companies available to recycle batteries and electronics in NH, including Universal Recycling Technologies, which has a recycling plant located in Dover, NH. In 2022, NRRA helped its member communities recycle nearly 1.2 million pounds of electronics.

NRRA also has educational resources available for solid waste facility operators and residents regarding proper disposal of batteries. NRRA’s Batteries Toolkit includes a video, best management practices handout, printable batteries disposal poster, and links to relevant resources.⁷ NRRA is also actively collecting and updating recycling facility signage for municipalities and could assist with designing free new signage regarding proper battery and electronics management if HB 1386 becomes law.

⁴ <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/workers-comp/most-dangerous-jobs-america/>

⁵ <https://www.waste360.com/waste-management-business/li-ion-battery-fires-unfairly-cost-waste-recycling-and-scrap-operators-over-1-2-billion-annually>

⁶ <https://www.nrrarecycles.org/news/lithium-battery-fire-lee-nh>

⁷ <https://www.nrrarecycles.org/waste-diversion-reduction-toolkits/batteries-toolkit>