

## Management of Waste Batteries under the Universal Waste Rule



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Quality

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### Background

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide guidance for managing waste batteries under the universal waste management rule. Specific rule language citations are provided throughout the factsheet. Federal universal waste rules are found in Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 273. State universal waste rules are found in Oregon Administrative Rule (OAR) Chapter 340, Division 113. Both sets of rules need to be followed when managing universal waste.

### What batteries are not subject to management as a universal waste?

(40 CFR 273.2(b)):

- Batteries that do not exhibit a characteristic of hazardous waste;
- Lead-acid batteries managed under 40 CFR 266, Subpart G;
- Batteries managed under household hazardous waste or conditionally exempt generator provisions; and
- Batteries that are not yet wastes. Used batteries become waste on the date they are discarded. Unused batteries become waste on the date the person decides to discard them.

### Universal waste handler categories

(40 CFR 273.13, 273.33 and OAR 340-113-040)

A person who generates or receives universal waste, including universal waste batteries from off-site for the purpose of consolidation, is defined as a universal waste handler. There are two universal waste handler categories: (1) A small quantity handler of universal waste accumulates less than 11,000 pounds (5,000 kilograms) at any time, and (2) a large quantity handler of universal waste accumulates 11,000 pounds or more of universal waste at any time. For a detailed discussion of the handler requirements, please refer to DEQ's universal waste handler factsheet.

### What are the universal waste battery management requirements?

(40 CFR 273.13(a) and 273.33(a))

A handler of universal waste batteries must manage them in a way that prevents the release of any waste or component of the waste to the environment. Any battery that shows evidence of leakage, spillage or damage that could cause leakage must be contained. The container must be closed, structurally sound, compatible with

the battery's contents, with no sign of leakage, spillage or damage that could cause leakage under reasonably foreseeable conditions.

Handlers of universal waste batteries are prohibited from disposing of universal waste batteries and are prohibited from diluting or treating universal waste batteries. Universal waste batteries must be treated, disposed or recycled by universal waste destination facilities.

Handlers of universal waste batteries may conduct the following activities (as long as the casing of each individual battery cell is not breached, remains intact and is closed, except when removing electrolyte):

- Sorting the batteries by type
- Mixing battery types in one container
- Discharging the batteries so as to remove the electric charge
- Regenerating used batteries
- Disassembling batteries or battery packs into individual batteries or cells
- Removing batteries from consumer products
- Removing electrolyte from batteries

Electrolyte removed from batteries or solid waste generated from the management of universal waste (for example, battery pack materials, discarded consumer products) is not universal waste and must be managed according to applicable hazardous waste management requirements, if the waste exhibits a characteristic of hazardous waste.

### Labeling and marking

(40 CFR 273.14 and 273.34(a))

Individual batteries or containers of universal waste batteries must be labeled or marked clearly with one of the following phrases: "Universal Waste-Batteries," "Waste Batteries," or "Used Batteries."

### Accumulation time

(40 CFR 273.15, 273.35)

Handlers generating universal waste, including universal waste batteries, are prohibited from accumulating universal waste for more than one year. Accumulation of universal waste longer than one year is permitted if the handler can demonstrate to DEQ that additional time is needed to accumulate such quantities as necessary to facilitate proper recovery, treatment or disposal.

A handler of universal waste who accumulates universal waste must be able to demonstrate the length of time that the universal waste has been accumulated from the date it becomes a waste. Usually, this is done by placing the date on the battery or container holding the batteries on the date the battery becomes a waste.

### **Who should handle my waste batteries?**

Be aware that as a generator of universal waste, you are ultimately responsible for the proper management, recycling or disposal of your batteries even after they leave your facility. Because of this, care should be taken in selecting a universal waste management company to ensure that your batteries are properly managed.

Universal waste batteries may be shipped from the location where they were generated either to a universal waste off-site collection site or to a universal waste destination facility. Off-site collection sites can include retail outlets that sell batteries, government-sponsored collection events, solid waste collection facilities that accept universal waste, as well as hazardous waste recycling and disposal firms. Universal waste destination facilities are businesses that recycle or dispose of universal waste and are subject to federal regulations governing hazardous waste recyclers and hazardous waste disposal facilities.

In choosing a universal waste management company, you should know how the waste is going to be managed, both at the off-site collection site and destination facility, and how the batteries will ultimately be processed.

### **Recycling versus disposal**

Recycling is often, for environmental reasons, the preferred management method for waste batteries; however, few firms actually recycle batteries. A list of battery recyclers and service companies who manage batteries is located at the end of this fact sheet. When you are contracting with a battery recycling firm, be sure that you understand how the batteries are recycled, which battery materials are actually recycled and which battery components are disposed. It is recommended that you make sure that you receive a certificate or receipt indicating when your batteries were recycled. Retain this receipt for your files.

Recycling particular types of batteries may be limited or too costly as a reasonable management option. If this is the case, disposal of batteries in a hazardous waste landfill may be the best option. Again, be sure you understand how your batteries will be disposed, and request a certificate or receipt of disposal for the batteries.

### **Health and safety considerations when handling and storing batteries**

Improper storage and handling of universal waste batteries can pose special health and safety risks. Steps should be taken during the handling and storing of batteries to minimize the risks.

Mercury vapors may accumulate in sealed drums if stored for an extended period of time when storing batteries containing mercury. Containers should be placed in a well-ventilated area to minimize worker exposure to mercury vapor emissions when they are opened to add or remove batteries.

When accumulating different types of batteries, be aware that some types of batteries may be incompatible with each other. Explosion is another potential risk when batteries are stored in contact with one another. Waste batteries that contain a residual charge when collected together may discharge each other, creating heat and forming hydrogen gas. If the container is not properly ventilated, there is a potential for an explosion.

There is a potential for partially corroded batteries to leak caustic chemicals. If proper precautions are not taken, workers handling batteries may get chemical burns on their skin. Workers handling batteries should protect themselves by wearing protective clothing, including rubber gloves, eye protection and rubberized aprons.

Management of waste batteries must comply with OSHA requirements and be consistent with the information provided with the battery material safety data sheet.

For specific accumulation and shipping management instructions, contact your waste management firm. If you don't know which types of batteries should not be combined, contact the battery manufacturer, company or site receiving your waste batteries.

### **Alternative formats**

Documents can be provided upon request in an alternate format for individuals with disabilities or in a language other than English for people with limited English skills. To request a document in another format or language, call DEQ in Portland at 503-229-5696, or toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696; or email [deqinfo@deq.state.or.us](mailto:deqinfo@deq.state.or.us).

**DEQ regional offices and assistance**

To request universal waste and hazardous waste technical assistance, contact the DEQ regional office nearest you.

**For or more assistance, see the DEQ hazardous waste program specialist in your area.**

**Northwest Region Office:** 700 NE Multnomah St, Ste 600, Portland, OR 97232, 503-229-5263

**Bend office:** 475 NE Bellevue, Suite 110, Bend, OR 97701, 541-388-6146

**Pendleton office:** 800 SE Emigrant, Suite 330, Pendleton OR 97801, 541-276-4063

**Salem office:** 4026 Fairview Industrial Dr., Salem, OR 97302, 503-378-8240, ext. 253

**Eugene office:** 165 E .7<sup>th</sup> Ave., Suite 100, Eugene OR 97401, 541-686-7838

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Alternative formats of this document can be made available. For more information, call 503-229-5696, Portland, or phone toll-free in Oregon at 1-800-452-4011, ext. 5696. Hearing-impaired persons may call 711.