

Facilities Management from A to Z

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Batteries

Batteries are classified as hazardous waste and must therefore be carefully handled and disposed of in order to comply with current UK legislation. The regulations define batteries as portable, industrial or automotive and by chemistry as lead-acid, nickel-cadmium or other. The regulations specify how waste batteries should be collected, treated, recycled and disposed of and set collection targets for portable batteries.

The Regulations entitle the end-users of batteries to have them treated and recycled at no cost to themselves by returning the batteries to their supplier or the original producer depending on the circumstances. This means that those who make or sell batteries must provide collection and recycling facilities for their eventual disposal. Most wholesalers and retailers have joined Battery Compliance Schemes to make this easier for themselves and for their customers.

Facility managers are likely to collect and store batteries on site prior to return to their producer or supplier, in these circumstances a risk assessment should be carried out on the methodology used. The receipt, storage, handling and disposal of waste batteries are governed by a number of regulations including the Hazardous Waste, Controlled Waste and the new Waste Batteries and Accumulators Regulations. All of these along with standard Fire and Safety regulations must be taken into account in the risk assessment.

Producers and suppliers are likely to have recycling facilities at their own sites but will probably use local collection points. Some schemes will arrange regular collections from end users' premises or do this on demand. These schemes usually provide suitable storage containers and guidance on their use. Alternatively there are lots of recycling sites on the net that sell purpose designed battery recycling containers.

There should be set procedures to control what goes in the bins, how often they are emptied and where they are stored. Without such controls, systems and proper containers the risks involved in storing quantities of old batteries are quite high, but properly managed they are very low.

Battery types should not be mixed in the containers, which must have adequate ventilation, be kept away from direct heat sources and emptied regularly. See through containers are useful as they help handlers to spot any contamination issues.

Although the producers of batteries are responsible for their disposal it must be remembered that while the end user is in possession, or has control of waste, they have a legal Duty of Care to store it safely without causing pollution or harm and to only transfer it to someone who is legally allowed to take it. The Duty of Care applies to everyone who handles waste; from the person who produces the waste to the person who finally recycles or disposes of it.

Guidance on the legislation can be found on the Environment agency website www.environment-agency.gov.uk