

“Most lead batteries do not end up with registered recyclers”

Staff Reporter



The Hindu The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 120 million people are over exposed to lead, three times the number infected by HIV/AIDS, and that 99 per cent of the most severely affected are in developing countries. File Photo: Mohammed Yousuf

Used lead batteries are not being collected in sufficient quantity to protect public health and the environment from lead hazards according to a recent report “Lead Battery Recycling in India” based on company records obtained by Occupational Knowledge International (OK International).

“Used lead batteries must be collected on a mass scale to facilitate investments in large-scale environmentally-sound recycling or we will continue to witness environmental contamination and harmful exposures from backyard recyclers and other marginal operations,” noted Perry Gottesfeld, Executive Director of OK International, in a release issued by the group.

“The current system is inadequate to ensure that most lead batteries are being collected and taken to registered recyclers.”

TCigarette butts spin money in Chinese city he report noted that most battery manufacturers took back very few used batteries from 2005 to 2010. “Given the explosive growth in the lead battery market and poor recycling practices that result in the release of millions of tonnes of lead to the environment, we can expect future shortages of this important raw material,” said Mr. Gottesfeld.

The report is being issued almost ten years after the release of the Indian Battery Management and Handling Rules that require lead battery manufacturers to collect a minimum of 90 per cent of the batteries they sell through dealers.

OK International has issued the report based on company records obtained under the Right to Information Act for six key States representing a majority of lead battery manufacturing units in India.

The key findings noted that only one of the 22 manufacturers, for which data was received, is collecting batteries at the 90 per cent rate.

Most major manufacturers, however, are taking back only a small percentage of their total sales. There is no central effort to collect information on compliance with the Battery Management and Handling Rules and there is no penalty for those who fail to meet the regulatory requirement, notes the report.

India has 336 ‘registered recyclers’, but only 17 facilities with capacity greater than 10,000 tonnes/year, (which is the minimum size requirement for lead recyclers in China) and only two have a capacity greater than 50,000 tonnes/year -- the size at which adequate pollution controls are considered to be cost effective.

“Although electronic waste gets far more attention, used lead batteries are a more significant threat to public health,” Mr. Gottesfeld added. In fact, there is more lead in a single car battery than in 26,944 cell phones, or six 27 inch television monitors or 11 computers.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 120 million people are over exposed to lead, three times the number infected by HIV/AIDS, and that 99 per cent of the most severely affected are in developing countries. Battery manufacturing accounts for more than 80 per cent of the global lead production.

Lead poisoning causes irreversible neurological damage in children resulting, in reduced school performance and lower test scores causing a decline in lifetime earnings. Adults are also impacted as lead is linked to hypertension, anaemia, reproductive disorders, and other adverse neurological outcomes.

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