

# Environmental ALERT

## New USDOT Regulations Affect Battery Recycling and Disposal

**O**n January 14, 2009, the United States Department of Transportation's (USDOT) Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) issued a final ruling on used battery transportation regulations. The new ruling, published in the Federal Register under dockets HM-215J and HM-224D, was prompted by three vehicle fires on U.S. roadways which had been caused by short-circuiting of their used battery cargo.

Effective January 1, 2010, regulations will require that individual batteries be isolated from one another prior to being transported for recycling or disposal.

The new ruling will affect almost all household battery collection services. Previously, batteries of various types and chemistries could be co-mingled together and transported for recycling or disposal. However, due to this new ruling, individual rechargeable batteries must now either have their positive and negative terminals taped or be contained in their own separate plastic (or otherwise non-conductive material) bag. The PHMSA is anticipating that such isolation will keep opposite battery terminals

from contacting each other during shipment, and therefore will reduce the risk of fire. Consequently, transporters of this material may no longer accept containers of unprotected co-mingled batteries.

Many municipalities and counties in New Jersey have already decided to discontinue or modify their battery collection programs, effective January 1, 2010. They are concerned residents will not take the time to tape or bag individual batteries, and believe that labor costs involved with doing so after collection would be prohibitive. Thanks in part to the New Jersey Dry Cell Battery Management Act of 1991 and the federal Mercury-Containing Battery Management Act of

1996, alkaline batteries no longer contain added mercury and are now classified as below State and Federal hazardous waste standards. Municipalities and counties are therefore advising residents to dispose of alkaline batteries with their household garbage.

Non-alkaline rechargeable household batteries, including but not limited to Nickel Cadmium (NiCd), Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH), Lithium Ion (Li-ion), and Nickel Zinc (NiZn) batteries, power tool batteries, and automotive lead-acid batteries are included under this new regulation and must be packaged individually or have their terminals taped prior to transport. Several commercial outlets have agreed to accept

(CONTINUED)

rechargeable batteries for recycling. To find a local retail collection site please visit [www.call2recycle.org](http://www.call2recycle.org).

However, two exceptions exist. Mercuric oxide batteries, which are only utilized for military and medical equipment, are only to be disposed through the collection system established by their manufacturer. Button cell batteries – those shaped like coins or buttons for use in watches, hearing aids, and other small electronics – are still readily available and do pose a risk for release of mercury to the environment. Therefore, these button cell batteries should not be disposed of with household garbage. Some municipalities and counties that have not completely discontinued battery collection programs may still collect and properly dispose of the button cell batteries through their Household Hazardous Waste collection events.

For further understanding of these and other recycling, solid waste and universal waste regulations and how they may affect your municipality or authority, please contact your County's Recycling Coordinator, Rich Erickson or Robert Teeter of Birdsall Services Group at 800-879-6681 (rerickson@birdsall.com; rteeter@birdsall.com).

