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New Recycling Rule: Don't Put Batteries in the Bin

For years, WM's [Recycle Right®](#) program has focused on three simple rules to help people recycle correctly. Now, the company is adding a fourth rule—reflecting a growing safety risk in the waste stream: **No batteries in the recycling or trash.**

The new “no batteries” rule is intended to raise visibility around a problem that has expanded rapidly as more everyday products rely on batteries, and the impact is already being seen inside waste operations. A study from the National Waste & Recycling Association estimates there are about 5,000 battery-related fires each year at recycling facilities nationwide, many tied to batteries placed in recycling or trash.

“Keeping batteries out of the recycling and trash helps prevent fires and protects the people and facilities that handle our recycling and waste every day,” said Ryan Nordt, executive director of recycling operations, WM.

While most people recognize lithium-ion batteries in phones and laptops, they're also found in items like wireless earbuds, electric toothbrushes, power tools, musical instruments, greeting cards, Bluetooth trackers and small household appliances. Alkaline batteries, commonly used in remotes, clocks, toys and flashlights, also pose risks when improperly disposed of.

[Market Reports World data](#) indicates most single-use batteries are alkaline batteries while [Statista data](#) shows lithium-ion battery demand will increase nearly 7X by 2030. More batteries means more chances for improper disposal—and a greater potential for fires in trucks, landfills and recycling facilities.

What changed in WM's recycling rules

WM's Recycle Right® program has long emphasized three rules keeping recycling simple: clean, dry and loose

materials only.

Adding “no batteries” in recycling or trash elevates the critical issue.

Why batteries are dangerous in recycling and trash

Batteries are designed to store energy. When damaged, that energy can be released quickly and unpredictably – with the potential to cause fires.

Damage can occur during normal collection and processing. Materials are compacted, sorted and moved quickly inside trucks and recycling facilities—conditions that can cause batteries to break, overheat or spark.

Common battery risk scenarios include:

- Compaction of batteries inside collection trucks
- Crushing or puncturing batteries in sorting equipment
- Battery contact with metal or other batteries
- Battery exposure to heat during processing

How to dispose of batteries safely

Batteries should **never** be placed in curbside recycling or trash.

- Visit batterysafetynow.org to find nearby drop-off locations.
- Use retailer take-back programs at hardware and electronics stores.
- Check local household hazardous waste collection programs.
- Tape battery terminals before storing or transporting.

Even batteries that no longer work can still hold enough energy to cause a fire.

Learn more about recycling and battery disposal:

- [***Recycle Right® Recycling Guide***](#)
- [***Battery safety information and drop-off locator***](#)

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