



June 21, 2019

Chair Ben Allen, Senate Environmental Quality Committee
State Capitol, Room 2205
Sacramento, CA 95814

Emails: Mimi.Holtkamp@sen.ca.gov; Scott.Seekatz@sen.ca.gov

Re: AB 1509 (Mullin & Berman) Lithium-Ion Battery Fire Prevention Act – SUPPORT

Dear Chair Allen:

The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) strongly supports AB 1509, as amended May 1, 2019, which would create a recycling program for lithium-ion batteries.

SWANA is an organization of more than 10,000 public and private sector professionals committed to advancing from solid waste management to resource management through their shared emphasis on education, advocacy and research. For more than 50 years, SWANA has been the leading association in the solid waste management field, starting with its creation in the 1960's in southern California.

The presence of lithium-ion batteries within the waste and recycling system is a clear and present danger to the solid waste industry and its workers. The increasing frequency of fires caused by these batteries have caused catastrophic damage to facilities, endangered the lives of workers and first responders, and are challenging the viability of waste and recycling operations due to financial pressures. As one article reviewing this issue described it, "around the world, garbage trucks and recycling centers are going up in flames" due to lithium ion batteries.¹

Lithium-ion batteries are already banned from disposal in California. But banning these materials from the waste stream is not the same thing as preventing them from entering the waste stream. California residents must have the knowledge and opportunity to properly recycle these batteries. This bill will address that critical need.

Resource Recycling Systems (RRS) estimates that between 75 percent and 92 percent of lithium-ion batteries are disposed of improperly. For the State of California, that represents tens of millions of

¹ Fowler, G.A. (2018, September 11). The explosive problem with recycling iPads, iPhones and other gadgets: They literally catch fire. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com>

batteries annually, and each one has the potential to cause a catastrophic fire in a collection vehicle, transfer station, landfill or recycling facility².

The negative effects of lithium-ion batteries in the waste stream are already being felt throughout the state. As cited in Section 1 of the bill, Shoreway Recycling Center of San Mateo County suffered a massive fire in 2016, leading to millions of dollars in damage and a disruption to recycling in the community. But for every large fire that makes the news, there are many smaller fires occurring at these facilities. In fact, RRS determined that lithium-ion batteries are the cause of more than one fire per facility per year on average. At the Shoreway Recycling Center, more than 5 lithium batteries per hour are recovered, even though it is banned by law from being there. Legislative action is urgently needed.

In addition to the regular occurrence of fires disrupting operations, the threat of fires has also led to an unsustainable rise in insurance costs for recycling facilities. Even a location with no losses is likely to see a minimum premium increase of 25 – 35%. For those places where fires are common, increases can be 100 – 200%, or they might not even be able to get insurance at all³.

All projections show lithium-ion battery usage increasing and the products using them expanding. Though the benefits of these batteries are extensive, the burden of safely managing them when their useful life is over has fallen disproportionately and unfairly on the solid waste industry. Instead of focusing on advancing from solid waste management to resource management, the industry is being forced to make costly investments to protect their employees and facilities.

The passage of AB 1509 will protect workers, support recycling infrastructure, and ensure that manufacturers and retailers share responsibility for the safe handling and recycling of their products.

For these reasons, **SWANA supports AB 1509**.

If you or your staff have any questions or need additional information, please contact me at dbiderman@swana.org or 240-494-2254.

Sincerely,



David Biderman
Executive Director & CEO
Solid Waste Association of North America

² Resource Recycling Systems (RRS). *South Bayside Waste Management Authority Lithium-Based Battery Assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.rethinkwaste.org>

³ Fogelman, R. (2019, April 3). March 2019 Updated Fire Report: Insurance Carriers Hightail It Out of Industry. *Waste 360*. Retrieved from <https://www.waste360.com>