



SWANA Statement on the Need for Emergency Coordination on Product Safety February 2025

Products at risk of exploding and starting fires create a serious safety issue for the waste and resource management industry, and the public. This trajectory is unsustainable. SWANA calls on producers and policy makers to join us and prioritize safety and responsible end-of-life (EOL) management in the design, labeling, and marketing of hazardous products to protect the safety of our workers and the long-term viability of our waste and recycling infrastructure¹.

Products with fire-causing hazardous characteristics and limited end-of-life options include: compressed gas cylinders; lithium-ion batteries; items with embedded lithium-ion batteries, especially electronics and vaping products; marine flares; ammunition; fireworks; and similar products.

While these products have become ubiquitous in everyday life, they have not been accompanied by plans for EOL management, clear labeling, or consumer education on safe management and disposal. They find their way into household trash and recycling bins, which has led to fires in collection vehicles, transfer stations, materials recovery facilities (MRFs), landfills, and waste-to-energy facilities². Even when consumers bring these products to their local household hazardous waste facilities, the cost and operational burden often falls on the municipalities to manage these products at end of life.

Storing these hazardous products is expensive and creates safety concerns. Unfortunately, there have been many recent devastating fires in California which demonstrate how explosive and hazardous products add to fire intensity, endangering first responders and the public. When hazardous products catch fire or are disposed of improperly, these items negatively impact the air, soil, water quality, and surrounding ecosystems. SWANA members are stewards of public health and the environment and take these issues very seriously.

The industry cannot handle further threats to worker safety. Despite many operational advances made to increase safety, the rate of fires in operations unfortunately continues to grow. Threats to essential workers will continue to rise as more dangerous products are released on the market without essential communication and planning regarding product EOL. Policy makers and producers must take urgent action to develop plans for managing EOL. Employees in the vital positions of public sanitation deserve a safe working environment.

¹ SWANA and the National Waste and Recycling Association (NWRA) issued a joint policy statement on the dangers of lithium-ion batteries in January, 2025 (<https://swana.org/news/swana-news-archive/article/2025/01/14/NWRA-and-SWANA-Partner-to-Address-Lithium-Ion-Battery-Disposal-Challenges>).

² According to Fire Rover, in 2024, there were 430 reported waste and recycling facility fires, an increase from 290 fires in 2017 (<https://www.waste360.com/waste-recycling/february-fire-report-fire-rover-s-performance-by-the-numbers>). The majority of fires go unreported. A report from NWRA and RRS estimates that more than 5,000 fires occur annually at recycling facilities (https://wasterecycling.org/press_releases/nwra-and-rrs-release-report-on-threat-of-lithium-batteries-to-waste-and-recycling-infrastructure/).



Costly property damage to waste and recycling facilities and the rising cost of insurance due to the rise in fires threaten to make it economically infeasible for organizations to continue their operations. Facilities that have sustained damage are often forced to close for extended periods, or permanently, which leads to direct negative effects on local waste and recycling management systems and those employed in those fields. Both public and private sector operators share a widespread and growing concern about the rising costs of insurance and the risk of becoming uninsurable due to fire and safety risks.

THIS IS AN EMERGENCY. SWANA is speaking up for our workers and urges brands and policy makers to take quick and decisive action to prevent the rise in fires through the following steps:

- Stop adding new products to the market that pose a danger of fire or explosion if they do not have an EOL plan that works.
- Design items to be recycled and batteries to be safely removed from products for proper EOL management.
- Label products clearly with their hazards, including whether they contain a battery or are explosive.
- Provide clear and proper disposal instructions to prevent disposal in household waste or recycling and ensure that a convenient and free EOL management option is available.
- Establish and sustain collection and disposal systems funding to manage these hazardous products properly.

SWANA encourages all stakeholders to take this issue seriously and consider the steps they can take to improve product design, labeling, and end of life management. To that end, SWANA invites producers of hazardous products to contact us as we start conversations on how to solve these problems as quickly as possible. Many of these products have useful purposes, and all of them must be designed for safe handling, with adequate funding to support EOL while also being convenient for the public.