

RECHARGEABLE BATTERY RECYCLING CORPORATION FAILS TO DELIVER ON ITS PROMISES

INFORM Survey Reveals Severe Deficiencies In RBRC's Battery And Cell Phone Recycling Programs

NEW YORK, NY, March 3, 2005: Monday, INFORM, Inc., a national environmental research organization released the findings of a new survey at the US Environmental Protection Agency's Cell Phone End of Life Management Meeting in Washington, DC. *Problems In Cell Phone And Battery Collection: RBRC Recycling Initiatives* evaluates the recycling efforts of the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC) in five cities in New York and New Jersey. The RBRC was formed in 1994 by members of the battery industry to initiate a voluntary national rechargeable battery recycling program in response to legislation mandating industry takeback of rechargeable batteries in many states. A decade later, in April 2004, RBRC expanded its focus, starting a cell phone recycling program. Governments in the US and abroad have been concerned about disposal of rechargeable batteries and cell phones because of the many toxic substances they contain, such as arsenic, lead, cadmium and brominated flame retardants.

"Even by its own standards, RBRC's recycling programs have been disappointing," said Bette Fishbein, INFORM's Senior Fellow who worked on the survey along with research assistant Aarthi Rayapura. Fishbein also authored *Waste in the Wireless World*, a groundbreaking publication that first called attention to the more than 100 million cell phones that are taken out of service in the US each year. Fishbein noted that "in 1998 RBRC forecast recycling 14.3 million pounds of batteries in 2003 and 16.9 million pounds by 2004 in the US. In reality, they were more than 70 percent short of meeting this goal, collecting only 4 million pounds in 2003 and 4.4 million pounds in 2004 for the US and Canada combined."

The first sign that RBRC's recycling programs aren't all they're cracked up to be came when INFORM survey team members were unable to locate seven of the 48 stores the group chose for the survey from RBRC's own list of drop-off locations. The picture became more discouraging as INFORM team members discovered that of the 41 stores surveyed, a mere 16 had cell phone recycling boxes; only six (1/8th of INFORM's initial sample) were identifiable as belonging to the RBRC program. The decade-old battery recycling program demonstrated some improvement but was still lacking, with only 21 stores having boxes for batteries, 11 of which were identifiable as RBRC. When collection boxes were present at the designated drop-off location, they were often hidden from customer view behind a counter. Locating boxes was made even more challenging by the lack of knowledge among staff at many locations.

INFORM concludes that if the industry's voluntary recycling program is to remain a stand-in for governmental mandates, the shortcomings illuminated by this survey must be remedied. INFORM offers several recommendations to help alleviate the apparent problems with the program:

- Detailed annual reports should be issued publicly disclosing the percentage of rechargeable batteries and cell phones recycled, along with respective recycling rates in the US and Canada,
- Drop-off location lists should be updated regularly to ensure that the retailers are in fact providing battery and cell phone take-back services,
- Efforts to increase public awareness of the program need to be expanded – recycling bins and promotional materials need to be visible and easily accessible in take-back locations; and,
- Staff training – so clearly lacking in the sites visited by INFORM – about the importance of rechargeable battery and cell phone recycling programs must be instituted.

“With increasing use and disposal of cell phones and rechargeable batteries, it is imperative that RBRC and the industries it serves deal with these issues effectively and in a timely manner,” said Fishbein.

About INFORM:

INFORM is a national, nonprofit environmental research and outreach organization that examines the effects of business practices, technologies and products on the environment and human health. For 30 years, INFORM's objective and constructive recommendations have served as a key resource to members of government, industry and community leaders around the world in decisions promoting both economic and ecologic sustainability.

For Further Information:

For further information about INFORM's new survey, or for fact sheets and information about wireless waste, contact: Amy E. Scott at INFORM at Scott@informinc.org, call 212.361.2400 or visit our web site at www.informinc.org.

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