

Ann Arbor News “Your World” Submission for 7.31.06

Many of us cannot imagine life without our cell phones, laptops, digital cameras or portable electronics. We use these items everyday and often give little thought to what we must use to power them – batteries. Batteries are easy to use, but what should we do with them once they run out?

More than 3 billion batteries are thrown away by American households each year. We use a lot of different kinds of batteries, all of which contain components that may be harmful to the environment.

Alkaline batteries (A’s, C’s and D’s), commonly used in items such as flashlights and portable electronics, are non-rechargeable. The positive pole contains zinc and the negative pole contains manganese dioxide. If these batteries are damaged, the potassium hydroxide in the cell of the battery can cause chemical burns if it comes in contact with eyes or skin. Their corrosive nature makes it dangerous to throw them in the trash – recycling alkaline batteries is your safest option for disposal.

There are a few different types of rechargeable batteries, including Nickel-Cadmium, Nickel Metal Hydride, Lithium Ion and Small Sealed Lead batteries – the metals present in these batteries are contained in the positive and negative poles. These metals react with each other to create energy. Often designed with a particular use in mind, these are the batteries that power our cell phones, laptops and iPods.

Using rechargeable batteries in place of single-use alkaline batteries will keep batteries out of the waste stream and save you money in the long run. Most rechargeable batteries can be recharged up to 1000 times. Yet regardless of how much time you can use a single battery, eventually it must be replaced. The metals used in rechargeable batteries – nickel, cadmium, lead, and cobalt – are potentially harmful to the environment and therefore, should not be disposed of in your household trash. The good news is that these batteries can also be recycled – the metals are extracted and used to make new batteries.

Please bring your batteries to the Washtenaw County Home Toxics Collection Center for proper disposal. Located on 705 N. Zeeb Road, we are open every Saturday from 9am till noon. For more information, please visit <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org/hometoxics> or call 734-222-3950.

Submitted by: Eva Kurkinova and Joanna Smither
Program Assistants
Washtenaw County Planning and Environment
Phone: 734-222-6874
Email: kurkinovae@ewashtenaw.org, smitherj@ewashtenaw.org
Website: <http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org>