

Environmental Health and Safety

Universal Waste Batteries

Purpose

Many batteries contain hazardous materials and must not be disposed of in the regular trash. Newer alkaline and zinc-carbon batteries may contain significantly lower amounts of mercury, generally 0.025% by weight or less, and are not considered hazardous wastes when disposed. Low mercury content is usually prominently printed on the packaging material, but not necessarily on the batteries themselves. Nonhazardous batteries, such as low- or no-mercury alkaline and zinc-carbon, may be disposed of as nonhazardous solid waste.

To avoid arcing, the terminals on lead acid and lithium batteries must be taped or the batteries must be in separate plastic bags. Keep batteries away from flammable chemicals.

Larger batteries should be repacked in the heavy cardboard boxes they are purchased in. By law, used batteries cannot be kept on site for longer than one year.

Battery collections

Used batteries are managed as “Universal Wastes.” Label the battery “Universal Waste – Battery” and mark the date. Small batteries can be placed in a plastic bag, then label the bag. If you have more than one used battery, you can label each battery or you may place them in a cardboard box and label the box “Universal Waste – Battery” and mark the date. Deliver used batteries to the recycling station at Recycling/Surplus or request collection through EH&S. To request collection by EH&S, use the online [Chemical Waste Collection Request](#) system.

Household Batteries

The University of Idaho Sustainability Center has implemented a collection system for household batteries that are commonly used in cellphones, laptops and other portable data equipment. These containers are intended for personal batteries: do not place waste in these containers that was generated by University activities. The E-media bins are also used for cell phones (unless UI property), inkjet cartridges, and electronic media such as CDs and tapes. Recycle all electronic University-owned equipment through the Recycling/Surplus/Solid Waste division.

Leaking batteries

Batteries rarely leak, but if you find a leaking battery, put it in a plastic bag or container. Wear gloves and wash your hands after handling. Fill out an on-line [Chemical Waste Collection Request](#) attach the waste label to the container, and EH&S will pick it up as hazardous waste. For a leaking lead acid battery (in UPS units and similar), we advise that you neutralize the leaking acid with baking soda (sodium bicarbonate.) Wear gloves and wash your hands afterwards and be careful with your clothing and shoes. Put the battery and spill debris (paper towels, gloves) in a container and fill out the request as above for battery and debris. If you have any questions, call EH&S at 208-885-6524 during business hours.

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Vehicle Batteries

Vehicle-type lead-acid batteries must be delivered to the recycling station at Facilities Services Recycling/Surplus.

