



Battery Product Stewardship in Belgium and Switzerland

Batteries hold special significance for the Global Product Stewardship Council. We led a European study tour that included industry-led battery product stewardship programs in Belgium and Switzerland (referred to as BEBAT and INOBAT, respectively). Several GlobalPSC corporate members, Call2Recycle, Raw Materials Company Inc., MobileMuster and TES-AMM Australia New Zealand operate programs that collect and recycle various batteries. The GlobalPSC is also currently assisting one of our government members, Sustainability Victoria, by facilitating research and stakeholder discussions for battery product stewardship in Australia. Here we look at some of the lessons from Belgium and Switzerland.

Belgium

A legal debate on how to regulate the use, collection and recycling of batteries in order to minimise pollution led to voluntary agreements between the Belgian battery industry and the government in 1988 and 1990 that aimed at reducing or eliminating mercury content in batteries.

Batteries have been subject to an Eco-Tax Law since 1993, but there is an exemption for any battery system that achieves certain collection targets.

Under threat of the implementation of the eco-tax, industry agreed to include all portable batteries (not just those containing mercury) under a new voluntary agreement, and in August 1995 set up not for profit organisation BEBAT a.s.b.l. to organise battery collection and treatment. BEBAT became operational in January 1996. The agreement with the three regional environment agencies regulating BEBAT's operations was signed in June 1997.

All three regions - Flemish, Walloon and Brussels Capital – introduced mandatory take-back for some batteries between 1999 and 2002. By late 2010, all three regions had amended their Decrees to bring them in line with Batteries Directive 2006/66/EC, but the main legal instrument remains the eco-tax.

Producers must pay a tax of EUR 0.5 per battery placed on the market unless they collect an amount of waste portable batteries equivalent to 45% (2010) to 50% (2012) by weight of batteries placed on the market (earlier collection targets used a different calculation but were nominally comparable). Being a mature battery collection system, return rates of over around 50% have been consistently achieved over the past decade.

The BEBAT collection system has made it convenient for consumers to return their spent batteries by providing a network of around 24,000 collection points, notably at retailers, municipal collection sites and in schools. BEBAT also spends heavily on awareness programs. Mandatory collection targets coupled with deterring taxation have enabled Belgium to be among the top-performing countries in Europe as regards portable battery collection.

Switzerland

Although Switzerland is not a member of the EU, it has adopted broadly similar rules on batteries. Legal take-back requirements have been in force since 1986 and voluntary financing by producers began in 1991. In April 2001, the so-called ORRChem Ordinance made the fee mandatory for portable batteries. Revisions to ORRChem that took effect February 2011 resulted in alignment with the Batteries Directive 2006/66/EC.

Producers of all battery types must report volumes put on the market to collective organisation INOBAT and pay an Advance Recycling Fee (ARF). Producers of electrical and electronic equipment with integrated batteries report through the e-waste systems SENS and SWICO.

Fees vary by battery sizes and chemistries. The amount of the ARF is set by legislation at CHF 3.20 (EUR 2.11) per kg for portable batteries and CHF 1 (EUR 0.66) per unit for lead batteries. The price that INOBAT must pay to the only recycler, BATREC, is also set by legislation at CHF 4,400 (EUR 3,520) per tonne. Battery retailers must take back waste batteries from consumers for transfer to INOBAT. Local authorities do not have collection obligations.

Waste batteries are collected at 11,000 obligated retailers and voluntary collection points (these voluntary collection points are mostly run by municipalities). Since the late nineties, INOBAT has maintained a return rate of between 65% and 70% for portable batteries.

GlobalPSC corporate members Perchards have provided research and analysis for this discussion and facilitated meetings with BEBAT and INOBAT representatives during our European product stewardship study tour. Perchards' WEEE and battery Policy Analyst Raphael Veit also provided recent program updates. We are grateful for their ongoing support and involvement.

For questions or comments, please contact the Council at info@GlobalPSC.net.