



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Batteries Fire Risk in Organics**

Batteries—in loose or embedded form—are an increasingly alarming hazard in both kerbside and commercial waste and recycling streams including the organics recycling industry. The Australian Council of Recycling (ACOR), the Australian Organics Recycling Association (AORA) and the recycling and resource recovery sector are overwhelmingly concerned about increasing incidents involving batteries causing property damage, serious injury and death—and resulting in skyrocketing insurance fees and financial assurance requirements.

The rapid digitisation of everyday items, the increasing number of ‘smart’ and ‘disposable’ items such as vapes, containing embedded and sealed batteries, and a lack of safe disposal options and poor consumer education, have all contributed to the steep rise in batteries in inappropriate waste streams, including organics. This is causing fires and property damage and is severely compromising the collection and resource recovery operations for recyclers all across Australia. It is also a significant risk to life; battery-related fires are often sudden and ferocious, fuelled by significant combustible materials within the waste stream – think paper, dry organic material and other materials very easily burnt.

In an organics processing facility, fires are disastrous. They are destructive to the materials being composted, they are a significant risk to infrastructure, equipment and of course, to the people working in the facility. They can be difficult to bring under control and the costs incurred from a fire in a composting facility can disrupt commercial business operations for many weeks, causing considerable financial distress to the business. In the year ending 30 June 2023, there were over one thousand battery-related fire incidents reported in the waste and recycling sectors nationwide, amounting to over three a day.

Governments have a pivotal role to play in ensuring safe battery disposal. Critical actions include establishing a comprehensive collection network, initiating robust community education campaigns, reforming e-stewardship practices, and enforcing harmonised regulations.

Deposit schemes have proven successful in driving stronger collection outcomes. Aligning economic incentives with environmental goals, as demonstrated by the success of container deposit schemes (CDS), will serve as a pivotal strategy in encouraging responsible battery disposal and recycling practices.

The Australian Organics Recycling Industry through AORA in association with ACOR are working collaboratively on this issue and are calling on urgent actions to be taken immediately by government.

As more and more batteries enter our homes and our lives, we have to consider their correct and appropriate disposal once they’ve reached end of their life. A batteries end-of-life has become a life and potentially death issue for the recycling and resource recovery sector.

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AORA Media Release – Issue Date: 29/01/2024