April 14, 2025

Draft Canadian Battery Association Extended Producer Responsibility Program Plan

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Re: Feedback on the Draft Plan

Dear Mr. McKean,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft plan. Zero Waste BC is a non-profit association dedicated to driving systemic change towards Zero Waste in BC. Zero Waste is the conservation of all resources by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery of products, packaging, and materials without burning and with no discharges to land, water, or air that threaten the environment or human health. Our current resource consumption systems of linear take-make-waste not only create waste but also generate a huge amount of greenhouse gases and toxic materials which constitute some of the discharges that threaten the environment and human health. EPR programs can play a key role in changing these consumption systems. For more information on Zero Waste, please see the Zero Waste Hierarchy.[1]

We are pleased that BC has regulated these products and that this EPR program exists. As the program plan goes for its next renewal, we submit these comments in hope that the program will work to meet the vision in the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment Canada-wide Action Plan for EPR.

Please see our comments by section below:

Section 1.1 Obligated Batteries

We appreciate the range of products that are part of this program.

Section 2.2. Governance

A Board with industry representatives is an efficient system for many aspects of governance but the program lacks a mechanism that is BC-specific looking at both the level of service offered in BC and the achievement of environmental outcomes. We recommend the creation of a committee with a wide range of stakeholders including recyclers, local governments, First Nations and environmental NGOs. This committee should be empowered to effect change for the BC program.

[1] Zero Waste Hierarchy: https://zerowastecanada.ca/zero-waste-hierarchy/.

Section 3 Performance Metrics

3.1 Sales And Recovery

The plan has appropriate data but it is not clear what impact the 5% of sales that are not part of the program has. Does it mean the system is being subsidized by the member producers/ Is work being done to add these other routes for sales to the membership list? Are those additional 5% included in the total data shown for the program? We also recommend that number of units sold and recovered are tracked so it can be clearer what is and what is not getting collected by size/type.

3.2 Recovery Rate

If the program is recovering 105% of the material going to the marketplace, is this due to declining sales of lead acid batteries or are more being imported? If imported, does a recovery of the core charge for these harm the producers? If imported, could it be that easy to transport batteries are coming into the system but this could mean that harder to collect batteries are not being collected? If part of the problem is how they are being counted, could the system not change to ensure counting of commercial and consumer batteries separately (listed separately for shipping or counted once received)?

Does the statement for the future mean that private recyclers are not currently providing information? And if that is not known, does that mean the program does not have proper oversight of how the batteries are handled?

Given the life spans of the different battery types, perhaps a calculated rate using sales, lifespans and expected amount available for collection by year would be more suitable.

The target should be to reach 95% recovery for both commercial and consumer batteries (reported separately).

3.3 Landfill Diversion Rate

We appreciate CBA participating in waste composition audits and support ensuring participation in all waste composition studies in BC and not only the subset that SABC funds).

Perhaps clarity can be made for what Landfill Diversion means in this context:
Is it the total recovery rate of the products (products sold versus products collected) and if so, should there be a more detailed spreadsheet of the sales by type and then their lifespan so it is likely to be more accurate? Or does the Landfill diversion also include how much by weight of what is available to collect versus the total amount of materials that were reused/refurbished/recycled versus went for disposal (landfill or if applicable, incineration)?

Perhaps for section 3.3. the better title may be Waste Composition Studies.

Section 4 Product Life Cycle Management

A section before 4.1 on design would be suitable. The program should work on the use of differential fees to drive product design change and foster longer product life spans.

4.1 Reuse, Repair and Refurbishing

The program should work to encourage and report back on the actions the producers are taking to enhance the ability to reuse, repair and refurbish, as well as to shift design change to ensure this is possible for a wider array of batteries. Ideally the program would charge a higher fee for those that are not designed for this. Perhaps more details can be provided as to why only 10% if 12 V automotive batteries can be refurbished to see if this percentage can be increased. Are there ways to design the plastic casings to be reusable rather than just recyclable?

4.2 Recycling

The high level of lead recycled is great and we fully support the work to have the electrolyte going back into new electrolyte, which if proven, would be the preferred option.

With the plastic casings, is there any contamination of the plastic from the other battery components? Is 100% of the plastic used for new battery casings or if surplus, would it make sense to move towards clear casings for all of them to improve the end value of the recycling product.

Section 5: Program Drivers

Diagram under 5.1 -why is 70% the target for retailer to collect or is this not a requirement but a fact?

In programs with true deposit refund, the program should aim to get 100% back and avoid unclaimed deposits, or overclaiming with materials coming in from elsewhere. Give this system is similar but with less transparency, can the plan describe more how it works and, if more than 100% is being returned, how the program or producers manage this risk and ensure a level playing field.

Section 5.2. Awareness

It is correct that most of the program products do not get returned through a consumer bringing back the item directly but to ensure due diligence, noting the many batteries that come to the market through non-producer channels in less common uses and the hazard that lead poses to the environment, it is important for BC residents to be aware of how to discard lead batteries properly. This may be less relevant to driving collection numbers and more important for risk reduction. The **goal should be to get 95% of the population aware** of the program by 2029 (and later 100%) with work done to increase awareness of the full range of products accepted.

While it is good that regular ongoing survey is being done, there seems to be no trend towards improvement, and there is a high degree of variability for some questions. For this reason, we recommend that the program increase its communications, particularly to the audience segments that are the least clear on appropriate handling of batteries. For those consumers that "can't be bothered", perhaps the core charge should be refunded to them and this included in the communications.

The fact that there are 8% of respondents with unwanted lead batteries seems high given the space they take up and the materials. Comparing to other stewarded products that might have much shorter turnaround times (packaging, small AA batteries and beverage containers for example) does not seem relevant.

CBA should assess the awareness and convenience of accessing depots through surveys similar to the one conducted by the Ministry in 2018. The 2018 BC survey noted 49% of the public had recycled their car batteries and 2% had thrown them in the garbage (4% could have been either); 53% of residents found recycling car batteries very convenient and another 32% found it somewhat convenient.[2] CBA should have a plan to raise this convenience number as well as a commitment to conduct a matching annual survey to measure changes. When asked why these items may have been thrown in the garbage, 19% did not know the item was recyclable, 35% did not know where to take it and a significant 28% said there was nowhere to take it or no way to get it there. This shows some key areas the program plan should address. Only 74% were aware that car batteries were recyclable.

The section on commercial outreach does not detail what will be or has been done. Also, there should be a survey of this audience to understand what gaps may exist in knowledge and practice.

Also note that many EPR programs do not have, or do not have easily accessible, materials in languages other than English that address different users of their program. Any residents who do not speak English are not able to easily participate in the programs. Based on the 2016 Census, 15% of BC Households speak a non-official language at home, so would need EPR materials and information to be translated into a different language to be aware of a program (let alone participate). This is especially important for the programs that need consumer/resident participation such as this one.

The use of an annual survey with more detailed analysis for certain products or audiences should be done after new campaigns to determine if they were effective or if they should be adjusted. This should include for materials in other languages to see if they reached the targeted audience and were effective.

[2] BC Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (2018). Consumer Awareness Survey of Extended Producer Responsibility Programs in BC. Accessed at https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/waste-management/recycling/recycle/rel-res/consumer_awareness_survey_of_epr_2017.pdf.

We support programs adequately funding RCBC's hotline and app with additional funds to help streamline and correct information. This funding should in no way hamper RCBC's other activities to work towards zero waste, which should be supported.

With regards to the campaigns outlined in 5.3, we support more targeted outreach and using different methods, with testing to see if these are sufficient or need more work. It is unlikely the distribution of one rack card without a tailored campaign for timing, partnerships and reaching the right customers will be effective.

Section 5.3. Accessibility

We support collection locations being available in all urban and suburban communities as well as all rural communities where these products are sold. We applaud that CBA is working directly with the Indigenous Zero Waste Technical Advisory Group and encourage the expansion of services to all First Nations and remote communities that need additional service (due to lack of retail/commercial options locally).

We are pleased that the program is not using the SABC standard but even with the Eunomia model, there should be flexibility to allow a community that requests service to receive it and to consider that the Recycling Regulation does not use drive time as a measure but in fact notes the need to accommodate "persons with disabilities or who have no access to transportation". The program should work with the BC Product Stewardship Council and the Indigenous Zero Waste Technical Advisory Group to determine the underserved communities and prioritize them.

Using information in the 2021 annual report (the most recent one available), it appears all regional districts had at least one return collection facility but that these 43 municipalities had no collection option available in their boundaries (note some are small and remote but some are large and urban):

Telkwa
Highlands
Metchosin
Oak Bay
Wells
Kaslo
New Denver
Silverton
Slocan
Comox
Canal Flats
Radium Hot Springs
Harrison Hot Springs
Hazelton

Fruitvale
Greenwood
Montrose
Rossland
Warfield
Anmore
Belcarra
Lions Bay
New Westminster
North Vancouver, District Municipality
Pitt Meadows
Port Moody
West Vancouver
Alert Bay
Port Alice
Lantzville
Qualicum Beach
Port Edward
Spallumcheen
Hudson's Hope
Pouce Coupe
Taylor
Sechelt Ind Gov Dist (Part-Powell River)
Sayward
Zeballos
Sechelt Ind Gov Dist (Part-Sunshine Coast)
Ashcroft
Lytton
Sun Peaks Mountain

However, there is confusion as the program plan notes only 43 locations (coincidentally) to which a DIY battery customer can take their battery (while the 2021 annual report listed 253 collection facilities). Accessibility should be measured on the basis of options for DIY alone, and not include spots where a purchase from a particular retailer or distributor is necessary as this represents an unreasonable barrier and is not accessible. If it is true that only 43 locations exist, annual reports should reflect this reality and the low accessibility must be addressed.

The target for coverage should be that 100% of the total population has access to either a collection depot, pick up option or a mail-back system (free of charge to the end user) for all types of products. A target of 2028 for full coverage is recommended given the program has

been around for 35 years and that in smaller towns, people may be more likely to exchange batteries themselves and to have more equipment that may use batteries.

We recommend that collections and sales should be measured per unit as well as weight. This will avoid issues where products change weight over time (usually becoming lighter) and allow for a more accurate measurement of recovery rate.

The program should list all of its collection sites in the plan (it seems Appendix A cut off after one page). In addition to having listed sites, the program should use a secret shopper service to see if the listed sites are actually accepting the materials. Users of other programs have had experiences where staff at listed sites have said they do not accept the materials, showing the need for better coordination and possibly staff training, particularly for the retail locations. Customer experience should also be evaluated.

Section 6. Operational Policies, Manuals and Procedures

The policy link was not operational so these comments are not based on specifics.

6.1.1 Littering -while the owner is responsible for not littering, the program should also analyze why littering occurs and address the issues. Does the site only accept from customers? is its opening hours not long enough or on weekends to accommodate the customers? Are there no collection sites in a community? For a program that has over 100% collection rate, the issues are red flags that perhaps the program is not meeting all needs. This should be a program responsibility to fund clean ups for batteries left in public spaces (similar to what the French Citeo EPR programs does).

6.1.2 Producer Pays the Cost + 6.1.4 Financial Transparency-while there may be no visible fees to the end customer, it appears that there are fees for the producers to pay for the program management and communications and that there are gaps in the collection system that may require payment to fill. More transparency on this should be provided.

6.1.3 Remote Communities
We fully support the work with IZWTAG and think all First Nations communities that wish service should receive it. We also feel that the program should address other remote communities and that these may be close to First Nations communities as well and so there will be synergies in addressing all of them.

The program plan may benefit from some streamlining to follow the standard plan component categories recommended by the province to make each section clearer. The program plan should provide significant advances needed to reach the potential of EPR programs as

envisioned in the Canadian Council of Minister of Environment Canada-wide Action Plan for EPR. We hope that this information is helpful in crafting the renewed plan.

Sincerely,

Sue Maxwell,
Board Chair,
Zero Waste BC