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Waste

Brits sitting on toxic battery mountain

BusinessGreen staff

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New 'Bring Back Heavy Metal' campaign warns households are hoarding 178 million batteries that should be disposed of in an environmentally-friendly manner

British households are holding on to an estimated 178 million used batteries, increasing the risk of the heavy metals contained in standard batteries polluting the environment.

That is the headline finding from a survey of over 3,000 adults carried out by Censuswide on

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Moreover, fewer than half the people surveyed realised that batteries are made of valuable heavy metals which can be reused, including lead, mercury, cadmium, zinc, manganese and lithium, while 52 per cent admitted to throwing used batteries in the bin, resulting in millions of batteries ending up in landfill where they can contribute to groundwater and soil pollution.

The survey was published alongside the launch of a new campaign from Hubbub and Ecosurety - dubbed Bring Back Heavy Metal - which is aiming to increase battery recycling rates.

The campaign, which is also backed manufacturer GP Batteries and compliance scheme BatteryBack, will see leading retailers such as Asda, B&Q, Currys PC World, The Entertainer, Marks & Spencer and Morrisons host public battery collection points, in an attempt to make it easier for the public to recycle their batteries.

Trewin Restorick, CEO and co-founder of Hubbub, said large retailers who sell batteries were already obliged to provide collection points under waste rules, but they are often hard to find within stores.

"Four in 10 people said they'd like better visibility of recycling points," he said. "The #BringBackHeavyMetal campaign introduces some unmissable and fun reminders in store at participating retailers which we hope will help raise awareness of how important and how easy it is to recycle batteries."

James Piper, managing director of Ecosurety, which helps firms comply with waste electrical and electronic (WEEE) directive rules, said urgent action was needed to boost battery recycling rates. "In 2016 only 44 per cent of the UK's used batteries were collected for recycling," he said. "That's 380 tonnes short of the collection target, yet this new research shows that there is more than 10 times the amount of the shortfall stashed away in people's homes.

"We will soon have the facility to recycle batteries in the UK for the first time and we hope that people will be inspired by this campaign to empty their drawers, keep their used batteries out of the regular waste bins and drop them off at a recycling point instead."

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