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**National Waste  
& Recycling Association**<sup>SM</sup>

**MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT**  
**Maine LD 474**  
**An Act to Establish a Stewardship Program for Primary and Rechargeable Batteries**

The National Waste & Recycling Association (Nwra) is a national trade association that is the voice for the private sector waste, recycling, and organics industry that is essential to maintaining the quality of life for all Americans. The delivery of waste and recycling services impacts all residential, commercial, and industrial properties on a daily basis.

On behalf of Nwra, I appreciate the opportunity to submit comments in support of LD 474. The growing presence of lithium-ion and other rechargeable batteries in the waste stream poses an urgent and escalating threat to public safety, infrastructure, and the environment. Improperly discarded batteries are a leading cause of fires in waste and recycling operations. These incidents pose significant risk to the health and safety of frontline workers, many of whom operate in high-risk environments with limited visibility into hazardous materials.

Fires linked to batteries have caused millions of dollars in damage to collection vehicles, transfer stations, and material recovery facilities. These fires disrupt services and require costly repairs or replacements. When batteries ignite, they release toxic substances that contaminate the air, soil, and water—posing long-term health and ecological risks.

Data from the 2023 RRS report underscores the scale and severity of this problem nationwide. Material recovery facilities (MRFs) experience an average of more than 18 fires per facility each year, driven largely by improperly disposed lithium-ion batteries. When applied across the approximately 298 single-stream MRFs operating in the United States, this equates to an estimated over 5,000 fires annually. The financial consequences are staggering: depending on severity, individual fires can cost facilities as little as \$2,600 or exceed \$50 million in catastrophic events, with more than three MRFs lost each year—approximately 1% of the national fleet—at an average loss of over \$22 million per incident. Compounding these impacts, property insurance costs for MRFs have increased tenfold or more due to fire risk, in some cases adding up to \$40 per processed ton, costs that are ultimately passed on to municipalities, businesses, and residents.

The facts are undeniable: improper disposal of lithium-ion and rechargeable batteries is a ticking time bomb. These batteries, now ubiquitous in our lives, are transforming our waste and recycling stream into a volatile hazard. Every day, without action, the risk escalates.

Recognizing the escalating fire risks associated with improper battery disposal, Nwra, through the National Waste & Recycling Foundation, a 501c3, has launched a national public education campaign featuring Woodsy Owl, licensed through the U.S. Forest Service, to raise awareness about the fire risks associated with improper battery disposal and to educate families on safe, responsible end-of-life management of batteries. This is referenced solely to illustrate the

importance of consumer education and awareness in addressing battery-related fire risks..<sup>1</sup>

The current situation is unsustainable and dangerous. Our dedicated waste and recycling workers, the very people who keep our communities clean, are facing escalating risks of catastrophic fires and explosions. These are not hypothetical scenarios; they are increasingly frequent and devastating realities.

The fires triggered by these batteries are not just safety hazards; they are economic disasters. They destroy vital infrastructure—material recovery facilities, transfer stations, and collection vehicles—imposing crippling costs on municipalities and businesses, and ultimately, Maine residents.

LD 474 would establish a comprehensive, producer-funded stewardship program to ensure safe and convenient battery collection, transportation, and recycling. This policy aligns with successful programs in other states and provides a much-needed solution to one of the fastest-growing threats in solid waste management.

LD 474 offers a decisive solution. This bill is not just good policy; it is a lifeline. It establishes a desperately needed battery reclamation program, ensuring these hazardous materials are safely managed and recycled. This is a proven, proactive approach that aligns with national best practices and prioritizes the safety and well-being of all Maine residents.

The benefits are clear and compelling. By implementing this program, we can drastically reduce the risk of fires, protecting our workers and communities from immediate danger. Further, preventing infrastructure damage translates to substantial savings for municipalities and businesses, freeing up resources for essential services. This legislation will position Maine as a leader in sustainable waste management, safeguarding our environment for future generations.

This is not a matter of if, but when. We cannot afford to wait for a catastrophic incident to force our hand. The time to act is now. The NWRA Northern New England Chapter implores the Legislature to recognize the urgency of this issue and pass LD 474 without delay.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Woodsy Owl battery safety campaign is a national public education initiative and is not intended to support, oppose, or endorse LD 474 or any specific legislation.*