

**Testimony of Lucy Sullivan, Director of Communications & Public Affairs, ecomaine
before the Committee on the Environment & Natural Resources
in Support of LD 474, An Act to Establish a Stewardship Program for Primary and
Rechargeable Batteries
February 25, 2026**

Senator Tepler, Representative Doudera, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Environment and Natural Resources, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. LD 474 will take a vital step toward resolving a critical safety concern for ecomaine and the nearly half-million Mainers we serve: fires caused by lithium-ion batteries.

I am here today on behalf of ecomaine, a non-profit, quasi-municipal waste management organization. Our recycling, waste-to-energy, and landfill facilities serve more than one-third of the state's population. We process more than 40,000 tons of recycling and more than 170,000 tons of municipal solid waste each year. Unsafe battery disposal – has become a persistent threat to solid waste management, and we believe that this bill will help to neutralize that threat.

- 🔋 **Battery fires at ecomaine are increasingly frequent.** More products, including inexpensive items people see as “disposable,” contain these volatile batteries – and we are seeing that reflected in the waste stream. The number of fires in our facilities attributed to lithium-ion batteries has climbed rapidly since our safety team began recording them in 2023. ecomaine's recycling facility has since suppressed **63 fires; in 78% of those incidents, lithium-ion batteries were the determined cause.** In 2025, reported lithium-ion battery fires at ecomaine increased 53% year over year. In fact, one of our recycling facility team members identified and quickly backdragged a lithium-ion battery fire while this testimony was being drafted. While we appreciate our team's quick reactions and successful responses to fire, their safety is our highest priority; they should not have to be heroes.
- 🔋 **Expenses for fire prevention, suppression, and recovery are ultimately borne by municipalities and residents.** To date, ecomaine has **invested more than \$1 million in fire suppression systems** in our current facilities; the tab for systems in the new recycling facility currently under construction is expected to reach an additional \$1 million. Other expenses include specialized equipment for staff members to wear when responding to fires; rising insurance rates; lost revenue from materials damaged and rendered unrecyclable from fire or water during suppression; cleaning, repair, or

replacement of damaged equipment; and lost operational time. We recognize that in waste management, these expenses are the “cost of doing business” – but when fires are more frequent, that cost quickly escalates. And that **cost is borne by our co-owning municipalities, and ultimately, their residents.**

🔄 **Impact of a single runaway fire could be catastrophic for recycling in Maine.** Even with these hefty investments in suppression and prevention, the risks are clear. I invite you to look at images we have provided of some of the battery fires which have, fortunately, been caught and suppressed by our team. As you can see, when a battery fire is nested in a massive pile of single-sort material, a delay of a few minutes, or even seconds, in responding to one of these events could be catastrophic. We have every confidence in both our team and our systems – but increasing frequency means increasing risk of a blaze beyond our control. **If a fire were to cause enough structural damage to our facility to stop operations**, even temporarily, one-third of Maine’s recycling would have nowhere to go – **nearly 800 tons of recycling per week from municipalities around the state that must be bypassed, landfilled, or otherwise relocated.** The lost revenue from recyclable materials that could go unprocessed, let alone the logistical challenges for municipalities and haulers, are staggering.



On 02.17.2026, an ecomaine recycling staff member spotted smoke on the tipping floor, deep within the pile of material on its way into the drum feeder. The fire was successfully backdraged, isolated, and suppressed. The source: several lithium-ion batteries together in a pouch. A battery measures approximately 6"x4". The tipping floor is approximately 10,000 square feet.



VIDEO >> watch video of a similar recent fire incident at ecomaine.

Scan QR or:

bit.ly/ecomaine

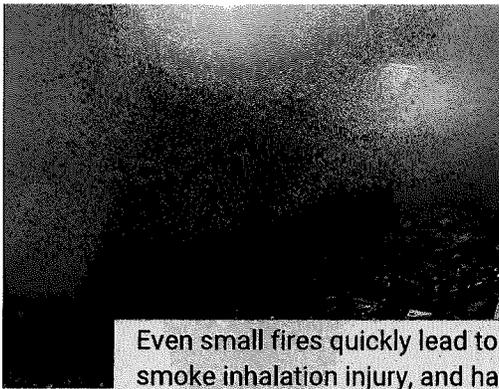


🔄 **Safe disposal is the answer – and it must be clear and convenient.** With more than half a century of waste management experience, ecomaine can tell you that convenience and clarity are key. When recycling is convenient – for example, curbside pickup – rates of recycling rise. When recycling is clear – for example, single-sort vs. source-separated – participation improves. This battery bill presents a vital opportunity to improve convenience and clarity. Requiring producers to sponsor more locations for battery disposal that accept a wide range of commonly used batteries will provide convenience and clarity Maine residents need to start making safer disposal choices.

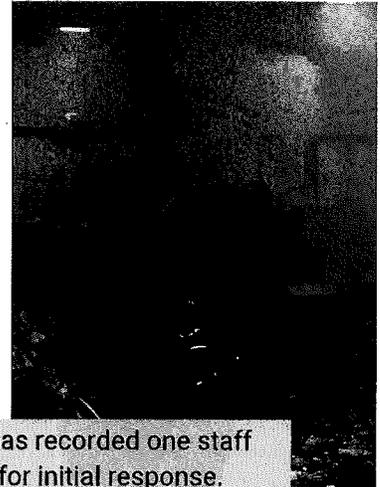
For the safety of Maine workers and residents and for cost-effective, sustainable waste management, it is imperative to reduce the number of lithium-ion batteries entering the waste and recycling streams. LD 474 is a valuable tool for curbing the tide.

LITHIUM-ION BATTERY FIRES

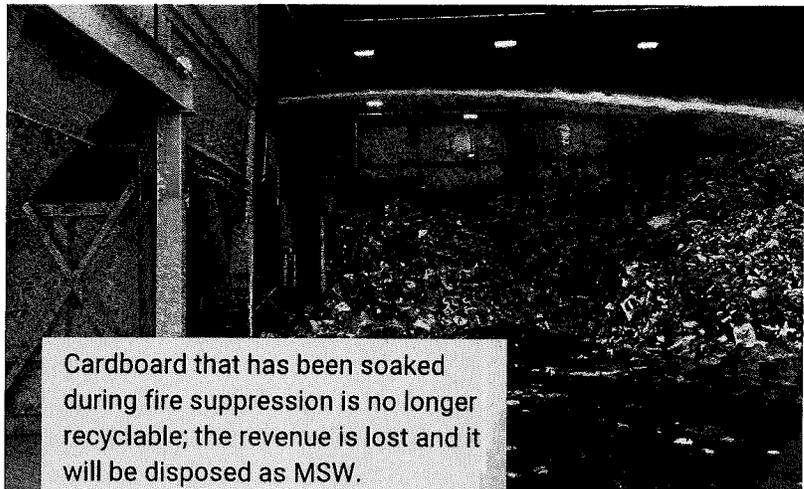
incidents documented at ecomaine



Even small fires quickly lead to unsafe levels of smoke. ecomaine has recorded one staff smoke inhalation injury, and has invested in specialized equipment for initial response.



Bale fires require staff to quickly reopen the bale and separate materials to isolate the cause.



Cardboard that has been soaked during fire suppression is no longer recyclable; the revenue is lost and it will be disposed as MSW.