

Batteries and accumulators and waste batteries and accumulators

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The Conciliation Committee reached agreement on a joint text for the proposed directive on batteries and accumulators. The main points of the agreement can be summarised as follows:

- registration requirements and exemptions for small producers: all producers must be registered with the competent national authorities and under similar procedures in all Member States;
- removability of batteries: manufacturers will be required to design appliances "in such a way that spent batteries and accumulators can be readily removed", and the appliances will have to be accompanied by instructions showing how to remove the battery safely and, where appropriate, informing the end-user of its content. However, these provisions will not apply where, for safety, performance, medical or data integrity reasons, continuity of power supply is necessary and requires a permanent connection between the appliance and battery;
- take-back obligations: distributor take-back is established as the normal collection method for portable batteries, and distributors must inform end-users about the possibility of discarding waste portable batteries at their sales points. However, alternative schemes already in existence may be maintained if an assessment (which must be made public) shows that these are at least as effective as distributor take-back in attaining the environmental aims of the directive;
- historic waste: producers will be required to finance any net costs arising from the collection, treatment and recycling of waste batteries and accumulators, regardless of when these were placed on the market;
- financing of public information campaigns: producers will be required to finance the net costs of public information campaigns about collection, treatment and recycling;
- capacity labelling: capacity labelling of all portable and automotive batteries and accumulators will be introduced no later than 12 months after the date of transposition of the directive;
- research: Member States shall promote research to make batteries less environmentally harmful and to encourage the development of new recycling technologies;
- treatment and recycling techniques: producers will have to use the best available techniques, "in terms of the protection of health and the environment", for treatment and recycling of waste batteries. Treatment and recycling schemes must comply at least with Community legislation in the fields of health, safety and waste management. Batteries or accumulators containing cadmium, mercury or lead may be disposed of in landfills or by underground storage if no end market is available. Such batteries may also be disposed of by these means as part of a strategy to phase out heavy metals, but only where a detailed assessment of the environmental, social and economic impact shows that this disposal option is to be preferred over recycling;
- recycling targets: although Parliament had called for a more ambitious target (55%) than the Council for recycling of batteries other than nickel-cadmium and lead-acid batteries, and had also wanted to see the introduction of a closed-loop for recycling of all the lead and cadmium contained in waste batteries, it decided to accept the Council's position on recycling targets (50%) as part of an overall agreement, given the other improvements secured in the course of the procedure.

