

Public Safety Advisory

Lithium-Ion Battery Fires on the Rise in Pennsylvania *A Growing Threat to Safety and Infrastructure*

Lithium-ion battery–related fires are hitting record levels across North America, and Pennsylvania is not immune. July 2025 marked the highest single-month total of reported facility fires in the past decade, followed by additional record-setting months in August and September. Notably, scrap metal recycling facilities accounted for nearly half of September’s incidents. This is far above historic averages. This troubling trend indicates that 2025 is on track to be the worst year on record for battery-related fires impacting the waste, recycling, and scrap industries.

How the Public Can Help Prevent Fires

- Never place batteries or battery-powered devices in trash or curbside recycling.
- Tape battery terminals or place each battery in a clear plastic bag before disposal.
- Use designated drop-off locations such as county hazardous waste sites or retail collection points (e.g., Call2Recycle locations at major retailers).
- Purchase name-brand, certified batteries that meet safety standards.
- Spread the word to neighbors and community groups about proper battery recycling.
- Find your nearest safe drop-off location at call2recycle.org/locator.

Key Facts

- **Record pace in 2025:** July (56), August (49), and September (45) were all record months for publicly reported facility fires.
- **Scrap yards and waste facilities hardest hit:** Nearly half of September’s incidents occurred at metal recycling facilities, and additional fires were reported at waste and materials recovery facilities across the state. This underscores that *both* sectors face increasing risks from improperly discarded batteries.
- **Fire season expanding:** What was once a May–August “peak” season for battery fires is now extending well into the fall.
- **Product quality matters:** Independent scans of retail batteries found that low-cost or rewrapped brands contained significantly higher internal defects — defects that can cause short-circuiting, especially when crushed or compacted.
- **Local focus:** Fire Prevention Week in Pennsylvania spotlighted lithium-ion risks, underscoring the urgency for public education and safer disposal practices.

Why This Matters

Hidden or damaged lithium-ion batteries can ignite without warning during handling, transport, or processing — even a single battery can spark a fire that endangers workers, destroys property, and pollutes air and water.

These incidents cause costly disruptions, damage community trust, and stretch emergency response resources. As awareness grows, Pennsylvania policymakers and local leaders are in a position to act swiftly to prevent future tragedies through education, infrastructure investment, and modernized policy.

Policy and Legislative Priorities

Pennsylvania can lead on this issue by:

- **Advocating for a legislative solution, such as House Bill 1233**, to address the growing problem of battery-related fires through clear disposal standards and expanded infrastructure.
- Supporting consumer education campaigns about battery safety and proper disposal.
- Expanding drop-off and collection programs through grants or partnerships.
- Enhancing first responder training and fire prevention planning for recycling and waste facilities.

Lithium-ion batteries power our daily lives — from phones and laptops to power tools and e-bikes. But when they're thrown away or damaged, they can become dangerous. By handling them responsibly, Pennsylvanians can protect workers, safeguard communities, and prevent the next facility fire before it starts.

Appendix: Case Studies

Lithium-Ion Battery Fire Incidents in Pennsylvania

York County — Penn Waste Recycling Facility Fire (March 8, 2022)

One of Pennsylvania's most severe recycling-facility fires in recent years occurred at Penn Waste's Manchester Township plant in York County. Investigators believe a rechargeable, likely lithium-ion, battery entered the recycling stream and sparked a blaze that destroyed most of the 96,000-square-foot facility. The damage was estimated at roughly \$36 million, forcing a complete rebuild and months-long shutdown that disrupted regional recycling operations. The company has since installed upgraded fire-suppression systems and renewed public messaging about battery disposal.

Sources: [York Daily Record](#), [WGAL News 8](#).

Westmoreland County — Garbage Truck Fire (July 22, 2025)

In Hempfield Township, fire crews responded when a garbage truck erupted in flames mid-route. Officials determined that a bag of discarded cell-phone batteries had ignited inside the compactor. The fire was extinguished before the vehicle was lost, but responders warned that lithium-ion fires are extremely difficult to put out once they start, particularly inside compressed waste loads. The incident highlights how improper household disposal of small batteries can endanger workers and damage expensive municipal equipment.

Source: [WTAE Pittsburgh](#).

Washington County — Smoldering Battery in Collection Truck (July 12, 2025)

A similar situation occurred in Canonsburg, where sanitation workers noticed smoke coming from the back of a collection truck. Firefighters discovered a lithium-ion battery that had begun overheating and issued a community alert reminding residents never to place rechargeable batteries in household trash or curbside recycling. Quick action prevented escalation, but the incident underscored how frequently these near-misses occur in the waste stream.

Source: [WPXI Pittsburgh](#).

Westmoreland County — Home Fire from Battery Disposal (January 24, 2023)

A family in Irwin, PA, suffered a house fire when a 9-volt battery's terminals made contact with metal items inside a trash can, igniting nearby materials. Fire investigators confirmed the source as battery contact and warned that any battery, even household alkaline or 9-volt types, should have terminals taped or be individually bagged before disposal. The case illustrates how lithium-ion safety overlaps with general household battery hazards, which are often underestimated by consumers.

Source: [WPXI Pittsburgh](#).

Regional Impact — EMR Metal Recycling Fire, Camden, NJ (February 21–23, 2025)

Although just across the Delaware River from Philadelphia, this multi-day four-alarm fire at the EMR Metal Recycling yard in Camden had major cross-border implications. Thick black smoke blanketed South Jersey and parts of Philadelphia, prompting air-quality warnings and temporary evacuations for roughly 100 nearby residents. Investigators said a concealed lithium-ion battery inside a load of scrap metal likely triggered the blaze. This case shows how battery-related incidents at industrial facilities can have regional health and environmental impacts extending well beyond the site itself.

Sources: 6ABC Philadelphia, CBS News Philadelphia.