

Taking the lead in responsible lead battery recycling

A recent report by UNICEF and Pure Earth has highlighted the need for urgent action to abolish dangerous practices of informal recycling of lead acid batteries in response to findings that 1 in 3 children – up to 800 million globally – contain worryingly high blood lead levels. The call for urgent action is repeated by leading energy storage firm Systems Sunlight, which has spent the last two years campaigning on the issue in Greece.

Recent years saw a sharp increase in the recycling of old lead-acid batteries as countries lacked the lead deposits required to meet the upsurge in demand triggered by the automotive industry.

For many countries, this led to the rise in ‘backyard recycling’ - an extremely dangerous and damaging practice of unregulated recycling by individuals or unqualified firms. The result is a toxic spread throughout homes and communities as remnants of batteries were dumped in local soil and water supplies.

Sunlight became acutely aware of this problem in its home country of Greece. In 2016, just 51% of the used scrap batteries were recycled or collected, compared to the European average figure of 95%. It is suspected that the remaining 49% of the used batteries were either disposed of or recycled illegally, creating hazardous situations for the environment and for people.

To combat the issue, Sunlight took matters into its own hands and built a state-of-the-art recycling facility, Sunlight Recycling. The plant, which is EMAS Certified, has the ability to recycle up to 85% of a lead-acid battery, with a minimum environmental impact, embodying the circular economy model.



Green Mission initiative

Knowing that this alone was not enough, Sunlight created the Green Mission initiative. The goal was to inform businesses and individuals about the importance of effectively recycling lead-acid batteries and aimed to increase the legal collection and recycling of lead-acid batteries.

“As a manufacturer of 3.2 million cells, Sunlight has a responsibility to ensure that its environmental impact is at an absolute minimum. Not only does proper recycling relinquish the

need to take further resources out of the earth, it is essential from a safety perspective. Batteries are toxic so if thrown to waste or not recycled properly they can be extremely damaging to the environment and people. Green Mission and Sunlight Recycling is actively assisting Greece’s effort to reach its environmental targets, increasing job prospects for the local community and aiding the reduction of mined lead,” said Spiros Kopolas, Recycling BU Director at Systems Sunlight.

The Green Mission currently has 67 member-companies throughout Greece. Each company is committed to ensuring that every lead-acid battery used in any part of their production line is recycled properly. Green Mission also introduced the “Green Spots”, a network of drop-offs where, for the first time, the public could leave their old lead batteries and be confident they would be recycled properly, under the Systems Sunlight guarantee. There are currently 65 Green Spots in 15 major cities of Greece, with a goal to incorporate even more cities in the year to come.

Sunlight has worked tirelessly to promote Green Mission through educational campaigns via reports, radio spots and social media. Since Green Mission began, Systems Sunlight has collected. ■



¹ EU Eco-Management and Audit Scheme. Sunlight Recycling is one of just two lead recycling firms who have been certified at this level.