CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS
CSA1 Bill Id:AB 696¶Author:(Ransom)
As Amended Ver:August 20, 2025
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Requires, on or before December 31, 2026, the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to convene the Lithium-ion Car Battery Advisory Group (Advisory Group) to review, and advise the Legislature on, policies pertaining to the safety and management of lithium-ion vehicle batteries involved in an emergency situation. Requires, on or before July 1, 2028, the Advisory Group to develop standards based on existing local, state, and national guidance and research aimed at ensuring best standards and practices that allow first responders to respond to lithium-ion vehicle battery emergencies in a safe and efficient manner.

Senate Amendments

1) Replace the Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services with the OSFM as the entity responsible for convening the Advisory Group.

2) Add and remove several organizations that will have representatives, as selected by the OSFM, on the Advisory Group.

COMMENTS

California Hazardous Waste Control Law (HWCL): The HWCL is the state's program that implements and enforces federal hazardous waste law in California and directs the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to oversee and implement the state's HWCL. Any person who stores, treats, or disposes of hazardous waste must obtain a permit from DTSC. The HWCL covers the entire management of hazardous waste, from the point that the hazardous waste is generated to management, transportation, and ultimately disposal of this waste into a state or federally-authorized facility.

Lithium-ion batteries: Lithium-ion batteries, which are widely used in portable electronics like laptops, smart phones, digital cameras, game consoles, and cordless power tools, are also widely used as vehicle batteries in zero emission vehicles (ZEVs). Lithium-ion batteries are hazardous waste at their end of life.

Fire risks: Because lithium-ion batteries contain hazardous and corrosive materials, they also pose a fire risk if not stored or disposed of properly. Therefore, any program to manage used lithium-ion batteries needs to account for this possible fire risk.

Lithium-ion Car Battery Recycling Advisory Group: In 2018, AB 2832 (Dahle, Chapter 822, Statutes of 2018) required the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) to convene the Lithium-Ion Battery Recycling Advisory Group (AB 2832 Advisory Group), whose mandate included submission of policy recommendations to the Legislature to ensure "that as close to 100% as possible of lithium-ion batteries in the state are reused or recycled at end-of-life."

The AB 2832 Advisory Group was convened and met quarterly between fall of 2019 and spring of 2022. The AB 2832 Advisory Group heard from 26 experts from industry, academia, and government agencies. The AB 2832 Advisory Group members also participated in

subcommittees to identify barriers and opportunities and to develop policy recommendations specific to three key processes for end-of-life lithium-ion batteries: recycling, reuse and repurposing, and logistics.

Recommended policies of the AB 2832 Advisory Group: Two policy proposals that define end-of-life management responsibility rose to the level of majority support of the AB 2832 Advisory Group: core exchange with a vehicle backstop, and producer take-back. These policies complement, and do not replace, current warranty regulations and programs that require the vehicle manufacturer to properly reuse, repurpose, or recycle a removed end-of-life battery that is still under warranty.

United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Guidance Memo on Lithium Battery Recycling: On May 24, 2023, the US EPA issued a memo titled, "Lithium Battery Recycling Regulatory Status and Frequently Asked Questions," which stated:

> "US EPA has determined that most lithium-ion batteries on the market today are likely to be hazardous waste when they are disposed of due to the ignitability and reactivity characteristics. Fires at end of life are common and mismanagement and damage to batteries make them more likely.

Due to the high energy density of lithium batteries, handlers may choose to discharge them before shipping them for recycling. US EPA recommends that handlers ensure that any discharge is done with all appropriate safety measures in place to prevent fires and protect the health of workers and communities. Lithium batteries may remain hazardous waste after being discharged because they contain ignitable solvents."

Risks and Response Strategies for Lithium-ion Battery Fires: According to the United States Fire Administration,

> "Lithium-ion batteries have emerged as the power source of choice for a vast array of modern tools and mobility devices. From toothbrushes to smartphones, construction tools to medical devices, scooters to cars, these rechargeable power sources have transformed the way we power our homes, cities and everything in between. However, there are risks associated with lithium-ion batteries, and firefighters must be aware of the challenges they present and the measures needed to mitigate these dangers when tackling incidents involving these devices.
>
> Lithium-ion batteries contain volatile electrolytes, and when exposed to high temperatures or physical damage, they can release flammable gases. Batteries can be ejected from a battery pack or casing during an incident thereby spreading the fire or creating a cascading incident with secondary ignitions/fire origins. Even after extinguishing a lithium-ion battery fire, there is a risk of re-ignition.
>
> Firefighters should be cautious of potential chemical exposure during firefighting operations, and proper personal protective equipment should be donned. Firefighters need to adopt strategic cooling methods to manage these incidents effectively.
>
> Vehicle construction and design is different for battery electric vehicle/hybrid electric vehicle makes and models, so firefighters and other first responders should get Emergency Response Guides from original equipment manufacturers to inform critical actions such as safe and

effective rescue and vehicle extrication. Familiarity with these unique designs is essential for swift and effective response.

Even after extinguishing a lithium-ion battery fire, there is a risk of re-ignition. Firefighters should implement thorough post-fire assessments and continued monitoring to prevent rekindling, including during post-incident transport and placement."

This bill: AB 696 builds upon the work by CalEPA regarding the recycling of lithium-ion car batteries, by requiring OSFM to convene a new Advisory Group to develop standards for first responders when responding to an emergency situation where there is a burning or otherwise damaged lithium-ion battery. The Advisory Group being created by this bill is similar to but different than the AB 2832 Advisory Group, in that the focus of this bill is looking at the management of lithium-ion vehicle batteries in an emergency situation.

According to the Author
"AB 696 is an essential piece of legislation which addresses concerns surrounding California's growing use of lithium-ion batteries. As electric vehicles become more widespread, the need for proper safety protocols for their batteries becomes increasingly urgent. The fires resulting from damaged lithium-ion batteries are difficult to contain and extinguish, endangering the lives of residents and first responders alike. In the Palisades and Eaton fires which tore through our southern California communities in the beginning of this year, the high-energy density of lithium-ion batteries presented a significant danger to first responders fighting to defend neighborhoods. These incidents make it clear: California urgently needs effective emergency protocols for handling these batteries on-scene. AB 696 would bring together state and local firefighting professionals, vehicle and battery manufacturers, and other key stakeholders to provide our first responders with evidence-based protocols to keep themselves and others safe as they protect our communities."

Arguments in Support
According to the California Electric Transportation Coalition (CalETC),

"This initiative is a critical step toward enhancing first responder safety and improving best practices for handling lithium-ion vehicle batteries in emergency situations.

As California continues its transition to zero-emission transportation, ensuring the safe handling, disposal, and recycling of lithium-ion vehicle batteries is essential. AB 696 recognizes the growing risks that these batteries pose in accident scenarios, where they can reignite days after an initial fire. First responders, who are the first line of defense, require clear, evidence-based guidance to safely manage compromised batteries, reducing risks to both emergency personnel and the communities they serve.

By bringing together vehicle manufacturers, state agencies, and first responders, this advisory group will develop practical, research-backed solutions to mitigate the dangers associated with lithium-ion battery fires. AB 696 ensures that safety remains a top priority as California accelerates its adoption of electric vehicles (EVs) and strengthens its circular economy for battery reuse and recycling.

CalETC supports AB 696, as it promotes a proactive, collaborative approach to lithium-ion battery safety while reinforcing California's leadership in clean transportation and emergency preparedness."

Arguments in Opposition
None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, on a prior version of the bill, there were minor costs and it met the criteria under Senate Rule 28.8. However, with recent amendments enactment of this bill could cost the state's General Fund an unknown amount, for OSFM to convene the advisory group and develop the required standards.

VOTES:

ASM ENVIRONMENTAL SAFETY AND TOXIC MATERIALS: 7-0-0
YES: Connolly, Hadwick, Bauer-Kahan, Castillo, Lee, McKinnor, Papan

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-0-4
YES: Wicks, Arambula, Calderon, Caloza, Elhawary, Fong, Mark González, Hart, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache
ABS, ABST OR NV: Sanchez, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 79-0-0
YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Flora, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

SENATE FLOOR: 40-0-0
YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Cortese, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Pérez, Reyes, Richardson, Rubio, Seyarto, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

UPDATED

VERSION: August 20, 2025

CONSULTANT: Josh Tooker / E.S. & T.M. / (916) 319-3965 FN: 0001285