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EPA Takes Action on Lead Problems at Arecibo, Puerto Rico Battery Recycling Facility

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(New York, N.Y.) The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reached an agreement with The **Battery Recycling** Company, Inc. in **Arecibo**, Puerto Rico requiring the company to prevent lead contamination from leaving the facility on the work clothes and vehicles of company employees and clean up an adjacent property. The **Battery Recycling** Company recycles used motor vehicle batteries and produces approximately 30 tons of lead per day. Lead is a toxic metal that can cause damage to a child's ability to learn and a range of health damage in adults. Among approximately 150 children tested who may have been exposed to lead from the **Battery Recycling** facility, 20 percent have lead in their blood above levels considered a problem among health professionals.

Lead poisoning can have serious, long-term health consequences in adults and children. Even at low levels, lead in children can cause I.Q. deficiencies, reading and learning disabilities, impaired hearing, reduced attention spans, hyperactivity and other behavior problems. Lead exposure can also cause health problems in pregnant women and harm fetuses. The agreement is the latest in a series of actions EPA has taken since becoming aware of extensive lead contamination in the cars and homes of workers at the **Battery Recycling** Company. EPA is working closely with the U.S. National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the Puerto Rico Department of Health, the Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board, and the Puerto Rico Occupational Safety and Health Administration to address health and environmental concerns related to lead contamination from the facility. Operations at **Battery Recycling** are being investigated under multiple environmental laws.


"EPA is very concerned about the extent of lead contamination from the **Battery Recycling** facility, and is especially concerned because children have been exposed to this toxic metal," said EPA Regional Administrator Judith A. Enck. "The agreement requires a series of actions by the company that will prevent lead contamination from leaving the workplace and getting into people's homes. It is one of a series of actions that EPA is taking to prevent lead poisoning among the workers and their children."

Pedro J. Nieves-Miranda, Chairman of Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board, indicated that EQB is working closely with EPA and other local agencies to achieve short-term solutions protective of the environment and the health and well being of the employees, their families and the community. "Our biggest concern at this point is ensuring that **Battery** employees, their families, the communities and the environment cease to be exposed to potential harmful levels of lead. EQB's support to EPA, and of the other agencies involved, will continue to assure that this situation is responsibly corrected and that the necessary controls are put into place so that it does not happen again." said Nieves-Miranda.

The EPA agreement requires multiple preventative and cleanup actions by the company to prevent lead from being transported to employees' vehicles and homes from the facility. EPA has hired an expert to review facility operations and provide recommendations to the company on methods to keep lead from leaving the property. In the short term, workers will have access to a clean area for changing clothes and lockers to prevent them from bringing lead into their homes and cars. The company will install a temporary decontamination station for vehicles entering and leaving facility processing areas. **Battery Recycling** will also clean lead-contaminated vehicles and homes of current and former employees and EPA will take samples after the cleaning to ensure that the lead has been removed. Rental cars will be provided and employees and their families will be

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temporarily relocated while the cleaning takes place.

In addition, **Battery Recycling** will excavate and remove lead-contaminated soil from a cattle pasture adjacent to the facility, backfill or restore the land, and dispose of any contaminated materials at a licensed disposal facility. The agreement also requires the company to reimburse EPA for the costs of overseeing the cleanup work.

EPA will continue to work with the company and federal, Commonwealth and local officials to develop a long-term solution, and will keep the community fully informed throughout the cleanup process.

To learn more about EPA's efforts to reduce lead risks, visit: <http://www.epa.gov/lead>.

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