Issue: Lithium Coin Cell Battery Ingestion Hazards

In recent years, there has been strong consumer demand for electronics, toys, musical greeting cards, and other items that are powered by lithium batteries (coin sized or smaller). Often described as button cell or coin cell, these batteries pose accidental ingestion hazards for children due to the objects’ small size. Data from the National Poison Data System, a leading source of information and guidance on ingestion cases, reveal that 1,972 cases of lithium button cell battery ingestion were reported from July 2012 to June 2014.

Position:

NEMA and the members of its Dry Battery Section are deeply concerned about the hazards presented by the ingestion of lithium coin cell batteries and have undertaken many initiatives designed to educate consumers, the medical community, and others on these dangers and to examine potential preventative measures. NEMA has provided substantial monetary assistance for more than 20 years to help underwrite the National Capital Poison Center hotline (referenced on battery packaging), which is used by consumers, physicians, emergency personnel, and others who require urgent information to address ingestion issues.

Through NEMA collectively and as individual companies, the battery industry has communicated directly with the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) in mutual efforts to address this hazard. NEMA believes that ongoing stakeholder initiatives and continued improvements to voluntary consensus standards are critical and will continue to focus industry resources toward advancing progress on this issue. NEMA is committed to working collaboratively with CPSC and other stakeholders to address lithium coin cell battery ingestion by focusing on five key areas: education/outreach, battery compartment design, warning copy, packaging, and battery design.

Importance:

Unlike other battery chemistries, the ingestion of lithium coin/button cell batteries can cause potentially serious injuries and can, if left untreated, be fatal. The most serious injuries are usually associated with 20 mm diameter lithium batteries (between the size of a U.S. penny and nickel). To improve child safety and minimize accidental ingestion of lithium coin cell batteries, all stakeholders—health care professionals, consumer advocates, electronics manufacturers, CPSC, the battery industry, and others—must work collaboratively to educate the public about ingestion dangers and to find and implement effective, innovative, and common-sense solutions.

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Did You Know?

- NEMA Members include industry leaders and innovative small businesses that manufacture products used in the generation, transmission and distribution, control, and end-use of electricity.
- NEMA promotes safety, innovation, interoperability, environment, and market enhancement through advocacy, business information, and standards for products, systems, and technologies.
- NEMA publishes over 600 standards, application guides, white papers, and technical papers.
- NEMA responds to codes and standards proposals of other organizations in the U.S. and around the world, facilitating the development of international and North American harmonized standards.
- NEMA was named in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 to work with federal agencies on efforts to enhance the efficiency, sustainability, and security of the electricity grid. As part of this, NEMA has been instrumental in the Smart Grid Interoperability Panel (SGIP) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Smart Grid Federal Advisory Committee.