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). Due to their small size, these batteries—like other small items—pose accidental ingestion hazards for children. Data from the National Capitol Poison Center (NCPC), a leading source of information and guidance on ingestion cases, reveal that more than 213 cases of lithium battery ingestion were reported during the two-year period from 2010-2012. While the prevalence of ingestion (as incidents per million population) has not demonstrated a noticeable trend, there has been an increase of more serious health outcomes in recent years due to the ingestion of lithium coin cell batteries.

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 over 20 years to help underwrite the NCPC hotline (referenced on battery packaging), which is used by consumers, physicians, emergency personnel, and others who require urgent information to address ingestion issues. In addition, manufacturers have: communicated to the medical community features that distinguish lithium batteries from coins in radiographic images; educated OEM customers and designers of products using such batteries on ingestion hazards; participated in numerous U.S. and global standards development activities to develop recommendations for warning copy, testing, and securing battery compartments; and conducted research on lithium coin cell batteries to determine what modifications, if any, could be made to reduce ingestion potential and/or mitigate the medical outcome.

Through NEMA collectively and as companies individually, 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—collectively and individually by company—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: (1) education/outreach; (2) battery compartment design; (3) warning copy; (4) packaging; and (5) battery design.

Importance:

Unlike other battery chemistries, the ingestion of 3 volt lithium coin 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 ingestions 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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