

Innocent Looking Toxic Bombs Are Everywhere

BY HENRIK JONES

One of my sectionmates from France, Laurent Amouyal, asked me where to dispose of old batteries. Where he lives, there is a system for recycling old batteries. Laurent reminded me that batteries are full of mercury and cadmium—two nasty toxic substances. According to the Earth Works Group, the annual use of mercury in batteries exceeds the federal limits on mercury in garbage by four times.

So what to do with these innocent looking toxic bombs? The short answer is to bring them back to the store where you bought them. Some stores have buckets for old batteries. I asked Commissioner Sommers of the Cambridge Department of Public Works about alternatives. "If you throw them in your garbage, it's the incorrect disposal of hazardous waste, but that's where most people throw them."

The long answer is that batteries can be recycled. However, Cambridge does not yet have that capacity. There is so much need for environmental reform that recycling batteries is a low priority. Cambridge is in the midst of trying to figure out curb-side recycling. This, unfortunately, which will probably take a year to get going.

Now that Earth Day has passed, many people are itching to do something good and assuage their environmental conscience. Unfortunately, environmental reform has so many ramifications that we are often prevented from doing good immediately; hence we become frustrated. Although quick action has been taken to deter color paper fliers, white paper recycling may not come into force at HBS until 1992 when Morgan is rebuilt. On the one hand, keep nudging. On the other, be patient and don't get cynical; we're making some progress.

Another suggestion on batteries: buy rechargeable. These batteries can be recharged by sunlight and don't go into the waste stream. Buying a solar charger and rechargeable batteries have high up-front costs, but are cheaper than disposables over time. Complete kits are available from Seventh Generation by calling 1-800-456-1198.