

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



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Lawmakers Look to Address Lithium Battery Safety

One of the challenges of representing the fire service before legislative bodies is the impact of developing technologies on firefighting. One of those developments that is generating attention from lawmakers at all levels of government is battery-enabled technology powered by lithium-ion batteries, and the issues posed by these types of fires for first responders.

House Bill 1913, sponsored by State Representative Brad Fritts (R-Dixon) would require the Illinois Secretary of State to issue a decal that distinguishes electric vehicles from non-electric vehicles. The Amboy Fire Department's former chief brought this issue to Representative Fritts, highlighting the differences in extinguishing an electric vehicle fire caused by battery failure to a fire in a regular vehicle. Modeled on legislation that passed recently in Wisconsin, the requirement for a decal is intended to assist EMS and firefighters with the best approach to take.

The bill is Fritts' second attempt to address lithium-ion battery fires, following an identical bill he authored in the 103rd General Assembly as House Bill 4675. Previously, the Secretary of State required electric vehicles to have specific EL plates. They discontinued that policy, making it more difficult for first responders to know if they are dealing with a lithium-ion powered vehicle. The Wisconsin law passed in 2023 requires EVs to have a distinct orange and black "EV Hybrid" sticker on the license plate. Fritts said he

will continue to pursue the legislation, pointing out that State Representative Jaime Andrade (D-Chicago), chair of the House Transportation Vehicles and Safety Committee has signed on as a hyphenated co-sponsor and has shown strong support for the bill.

In Virginia, lawmakers passed legislation requiring first responders to receive specialized training on the fire risks associated with EVs. The training mandated by the legislation includes training on high-voltage batteries, potential for electrical arcing, and how to extricate occupants of EVs and extinguish battery fires. The mandated training applies to all firefighters, including volunteers, and must be completed by December 1, 2025. In promoting the legislation, the Virginia Professional Firefighters Association noted the differences in vehicle fires, including the potential for battery fires to re-ignite and the additional amount of water needed to extinguish a battery fire.

Some jurisdictions were early to address the issue of first responder safety and lithium batteries. New York City passed five bills, including measures to prohibit the sale, lease or rental of e-bikes not meeting safety standards. In addition to passing these bills, city leaders called on the federal government to act. Congress responded, passing House Resolution 973 in April 2025. HR 973 creates the Setting Consumer Standards for Lithium-ion Batteries Act. The bill would require the Consumer Products Safety Commission to finalize standards for battery-enabled

devices within 180 days of passage and would establish ANSI/CAN/UL ratings for light electric vehicles, e-bikes and person e-mobility devices. HR 973 also requires the CPSC to submit a report to Congress of their findings within five years. The bill is supported by the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Much of the training and legislation to address safety is being driven by organizations including the National Fire Protection Association and supported by research by the Fire Safety Research Institute, a part of the UL Research Institutes. Their research addresses the issues posed by a lithium battery fires in a residential setting, and found that battery abuse, use of uncertified batteries, and modifications of devices sharply increased the potential for a battery failure resulting in an explosion.

Safety issues with lithium-ion batteries will continue to be of interest to lawmakers. IAFPD will continue to monitor these developments on both the state and national level and ensure that first responder safety and impact on fire protection districts are considered when crafting laws to address the hazards inherent with this technology. ■