

NEWS RELEASE

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Residents urged to 'Stop the Spark' by keeping batteries and vapes out of household bins

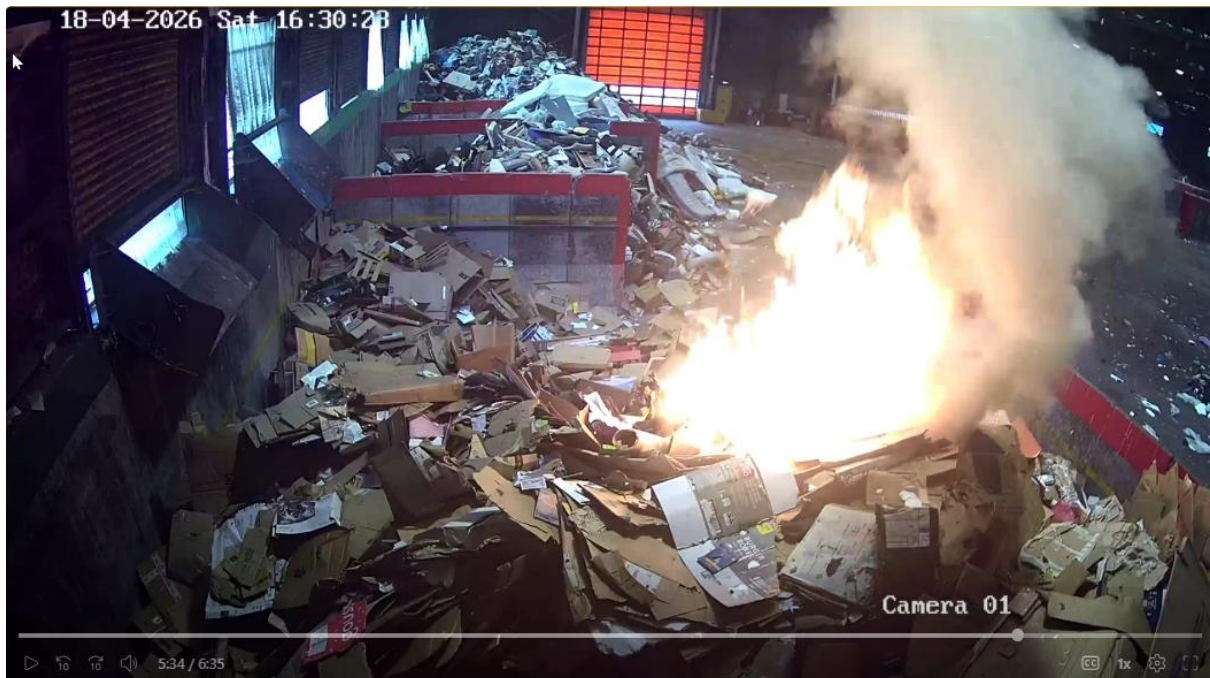


Image caption: Electrical fire at Chichester Recycling Centre, Westhampnett

West Sussex County Council has joined forces with its waste contractor Biffa, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and environmental education charity Wastebuster to encourage residents to think before they throw away batteries, vapes and electrical items.

The new "Stop the Spark" campaign aims to reduce the growing number of fires caused by people incorrectly disposing of batteries and electricals with a simple message: **If it has a plug, battery or cable, don't bin it**.

Councillor Natasha Davie, Cabinet Member for Environment and Climate Change at West Sussex County Council, said: "Many people don't realise that batteries hidden inside everyday items can cause serious fires when they enter the recycling and waste system. These incidents put people at risk and can disrupt services for communities across West Sussex."

"We're asking residents to make one simple change: if an item has a plug, battery or cable, don't put it in your bin. Instead, take it to a Recycling Centre or another suitable collection point so it can be disposed of safely."

Batteries, vapes and small electrical items should never be placed in household recycling or general waste bins, or in general waste containers at Recycling Centres. If these items are crushed, damaged or punctured during collection, transport or processing, they can overheat, ignite and cause serious fires.

These fires put residents, firefighters, collection crews and staff working at Recycling Centres and waste facilities at risk. They can also damage vehicles, equipment and infrastructure, disrupt recycling and waste services, and lead to temporary site closures.

Darren Wickings, West Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Station Manager, said: "Fires caused by batteries, vapes and other electrical items are becoming an increasing concern both locally and nationally. Many of these fires start when items that contain lithium-ion batteries are placed in household waste or recycling bins and then damaged during collection, sorting or processing. Once punctured or crushed, these batteries can ignite quickly and without warning.

"In West Sussex, we are seeing the consequences of this first-hand, with dozens of fires already recorded at recycling and waste facilities and in collection vehicles. These incidents put crews, site staff and members of the public at risk, and can cause significant damage and disruption.

"The good news is that these fires are largely preventable. We are asking residents to take a moment to think before throwing something away. If it has a plug, battery or cable, don't bin it. By disposing of these items correctly, residents can help reduce the risk of fires and play an important role in keeping their communities safe."

So far in 2026, there have been 40 fires linked to batteries and electrical items at the county's Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) in Ford, in waste collection vehicles and at Recycling Centres. A further 199 fires caused by batteries, vapes and small electrical items were recorded at the Anaerobic Digestion and Resource Recovery Facility (ADRFF) in Horsham between June 2024 and May 2025.

STOP THE SPARK!



Susie Chasmar, Contract Director for Biffa West Sussex, said: “Batteries are powering more of the products we use every day but, when they are thrown away incorrectly, they pose a serious fire risk. Across the recycling and waste sector, battery-related fires are significantly increasing, putting our people, vehicles, facilities and essential local services at risk. Whether it’s a vape, a toy, a power tool or a household gadget, batteries should never be placed in your general waste or recycling bin. We’re urging residents across West Sussex to use dedicated battery recycling points or household waste Recycling Centres. Taking a few moments to dispose of batteries safely can help prevent fires, protect our people and keep communities safe.”

Residents can recycle batteries, vapes and electrical items safely through a range of collection and recycling services across West Sussex, including kerbside collection in some areas. By taking a few extra moments to find out where to dispose of these items correctly, residents can help prevent fires, protect frontline workers and ensure valuable materials are recovered and recycled.

David Ingham, Waste and Recycling Programmes Manager at Wastebuster, said: "Wastebuster is proud to support Stop the Spark. Education has an important role to play in helping children and families understand why batteries and electrical items must be kept out of household bins, and what they can do instead.

"Through our Recycle to Read Battery Collection Programme, supported by Valpak, 21 West Sussex schools collected 392kg of used batteries during the 2025–26 academic year. It shows how combining education with simple, practical ways to take action can make a real difference. By helping children understand the issue and take that message home to their families, we can encourage safer recycling, prevent avoidable fires and keep valuable materials in use."

Keeping these items out of household bins also reduces waste and helps recover valuable materials such as lithium, copper and aluminium that can be used again. From June 2024 to May 2025, West Sussex residents correctly recycled just under 50 tonnes of batteries, over 8 tonnes of vapes, and 3 tonnes of small electrical items at Recycling Centres.

For more information about where to recycle batteries, vapes and electrical items, visit [Stop the Spark - West Sussex County Council](#)

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