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U.S. Department of Transportation Issues New Standards to Improve Safety of Lithium Battery Transportation

PHMSA 03-14

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) today issued new standards to strengthen safety conditions for the shipment of lithium cells and batteries. These changes, some of which focus specifically on shipments by air, will better ensure that lithium cells and batteries are able to withstand normal transportation conditions and are packaged to reduce the possibility of damage that could lead to an unsafe situation.

“Safety is our number one priority, and this rule provides an additional layer of protection to the shipment of lithium batteries, which we all depend on daily to power our phones and our laptops,” said Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx. “Today’s standards are part of our ongoing work to improve safety for all travelers, including those who travel with or ship lithium batteries.”

The Department's Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) developed this rule in close coordination with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Voluntary compliance is encouraged upon publication of the final rule; however mandatory compliance is effective six months after publication.

The rule will also provide a greater level of consistency with international standards, including the International Civil Aviation Organization’s (ICAO) Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by air.

“Our continuing efforts to harmonize U.S. Hazardous Materials Regulations with international standards improve consistency in procedures and terminology when shipping lithium batteries around the globe,” noted PHMSA Administrator Cynthia L. Quarterman.

The final rule will:

- Enhance packaging and hazard communication requirements for lithium batteries transported by air;
- Replace equivalent lithium content with Watt-hours for lithium ion cells and batteries;
- Adopt separate shipping descriptions for lithium metal batteries and lithium ion batteries;
- Revise provisions for the transport of small and medium lithium cells and batteries including cells and batteries packed with, or contained in, equipment;
- Revise the requirements for the transport of lithium batteries for disposal or recycling;

- Harmonize the provisions for the transport of low production and prototype lithium cells and batteries with the ICAO Technical Instructions and the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code; and
- Adopt new provisions for the transport of damaged, defective, and recalled lithium batteries.

PHMSA develops and enforces regulations for the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound operation of the nation's 2.6 million mile pipeline transportation system and the nearly one million daily shipments of hazardous materials by land, sea, and air. Please visit www.phmsa.dot.gov for more information.

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