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Press Release

Government, Stakeholders Pledge Policy Action and Strong Enforcement to Curb Lead Pollution and Reform the Lead-Acid Battery Sector

Dhaka, Bangladesh: Lead pollution remains a major public health issue in Bangladesh, driven largely by lead-acid battery (LAB) production and recycling. The rapid growth of electric three-wheelers has increased demand for LABs and the volume of used batteries. However, about 70–80% of recycling occurs in informal, poorly regulated facilities, releasing toxic lead into the environment and causing serious health risks, revenue losses, and energy inefficiencies.

It is estimated that approximately 167,000 metric tonnes of lead waste are generated annually from used lead-acid batteries in Bangladesh, with nearly 15–20% of the lead content released into the environment during informal recycling processes. Much of this recycling occurs outside formal regulatory oversight, resulting in **substantial economic loss, an estimated BDT 915 crore in foregone government revenue.** At the same time, the market for electric three-wheeler (E3W) batteries alone is valued at approximately BDT 8,710 crore, indicating the sheer scale of the sector.

Lead is a neurotoxin that causes serious health harm, especially in children, including IQ loss and cognitive impairment, and in adults, cardiovascular issues and pregnancy complications. A Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics survey found 38.34% of children have high blood lead levels, and the World Health Organization states there is no safe level of lead exposure.

Recognizing the critical role of regulatory policies, taxation, and industrial oversight in shaping the LAB sector, the **Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, in collaboration with the **Department of Environment (DoE)** and **Pure Earth**, organized a **stakeholder consultation meeting titled *"Lead-Acid Battery Circular Economy with Formal and Informal Processes"*** on **8 April 2026 at the Secretariat.**

The one and half hour session was presided over by **Mohammad Rayhan Kaosar, Honorable Secretary, MoEFCC,** as **Chief Guest. Dr. Fahmida Khanom, Additional Secretary, MoEFCC, chaired** the session. Distinguished participants included **Dr. Nurun Nahar, Director General (DG) (Additional Responsibilities), Department of Environment, Mitali Das, Country Director, Pure Earth, Professor Yewon Kim of Stanford University, and Mr. Henrique Pacini, Economic Affairs Officer at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).**

The consultation brought together **nearly 40 stakeholders** from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, international development partners, private sector representatives, and academia.

The event showcased research and policy recommendations from the **Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) Programme**. Led by **Pure Earth** with support from **Georgetown and Stanford** universities, the study analyzed lead flows in Bangladesh's battery supply chain and proposed ways to cut emissions while keeping the sector viable.

A **technical session featured a joint presentation by Professor Erica Plambeck and Professor Yewon Kim,** highlighting key insights into the interaction between formal and informal recycling systems, market incentives, and regulatory conditions shaping industry practices. **The key policy recommendations include: fiscal mechanisms such as a subsidy and used battery collection support for low-emission smelters, imposing smelting fee on lead-acid battery sales, public registry and traceability features for batteries, facilitate used lead-acid battery (ULAB) export and increase the import taxation on lead.** The meeting also included a presentation by the Country Director of Pure Earth Bangladesh on the impact of lead pollution and ongoing national efforts for mitigation, followed by an open discussion where stakeholders reflected on policy implications and implementation.

Speaking at the event, **Md. Rayhan Kaosar, Honorable Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change** emphasized the importance of coordinated policy action to address lead pollution, *"Given the widespread and dispersed nature of informal recycling operations across the country, we must engage the local government authorities to reduce unsafe lead-acid battery recycling. By strengthening their awareness of the environmental and*

public health impacts, local administrations can be prompted to take actions against illegal, informal recyclers who function without trade licenses or environmental clearances."

Mitali Das, Country Director, Pure Earth Bangladesh said, "*By implementing targeted policy measures such as supporting low-emission formal recyclers, improving battery traceability, and regulating informal operations we can protect children from the severe health impacts of lead exposure. Strengthening the formal sector while curbing unsafe informal practices is essential to break the intergenerational cycle of lead poisoning and ensure a lead-free Bangladesh*."

Henrique Pacini, Economic Affairs Officer, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) said, "*The SMEP Programme is impressed by the progress achieved and the recommendations emerging from this project. The economic instruments discussed today to reduce informal recycling practices must be complemented by robust regulatory measures, particularly supporting the sector's formalization, strengthening consumer protection through improved battery quality standards, and enforcing stricter controls on informal operations."*

In her closing remarks, the Chair of the meeting, **Dr. Fahmida Khanom, Additional Secretary, MoEFCC** highlighted the significance of evidence-based dialogue in shaping future policy directions, "*The recommendations presented today are very timely and we will work to integrate them into our ongoing policy processes. Given that a significant share of lead-acid batteries produced in the formal sector originates from informal sources, a balanced approach will be essential for the gradual formalization of the sector."*

The meeting was attended by officials from key government agencies, including Md. Mijanur Rahman, Second Secretary, National Board of Revenue (NBR); Md. Manjurul Karim, Deputy Director, Chemical Wing, Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI); representatives from the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS); Toufiq Rahman, Assistant Director, Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA); and Ms. Nurun Nahar, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Industries, among others.

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About SMEP:

The "Development of Business Models and Policy Interventions to Reduce Informal ULAB Recycling in Bangladesh" project under the Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution (SMEP) programme is led by Pure Earth Bangladesh, who have anchored the policy and stakeholder dialogues, supported by a research team led by Georgetown and Stanford

Universities, along with local partners. The program is funded by the UK's FCDO and implemented with UNCTAD, supporting developing countries in reducing industrial pollution while promoting sustainable production. The lead acid battery sector was prioritized in Bangladesh due to its importance to the country's transportation, energy storage, and manufacturing systems.

Learn more about the study:

https://www.pureearth.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/Circular-Economy-v4.pdf