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Subject: EPA designates burned Lithium BESS site as a "Superfund" site due to contamination/toxicity levels a year after the fire as the site poses an immediate and long term threat to people's health and the environment
Date: Tuesday, July 29, 2025 4:46:54 PM
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External Email

Good afternoon EFSEC,

I hope you are all having a wonderful day!

I wanted to share the EPA's news release about a lithium BESS that burned down in Otay Mesa, CA in 2024 when it experienced unstoppable cascading thermal runaway last year in May and burned and forced evacuations for almost 3 weeks and now is totally contaminated and required the EPA to step-in to take control of cleanup:

EPA Orders Cleanup Following Battery Fire at Gateway Energy Storage Facility in San Diego

July 7, 2025

Contact Information

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SAN DIEGO, Calif. (July 7, 2025) – U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has entered into a settlement agreement with Gateway Energy Storage, LLC to direct cleanup in the wake of a lithium-ion battery fire that occurred at the company's energy storage facility in San Diego.

"Calling a technology 'green energy' does not mean there are no environmental impacts. This is an issue of growing concern," **said EPA Pacific Southwest Region Administrator Josh F.W. Cook.** "I am alarmed by the incidents and impacts of utility grade battery fires on first responders, specifically the professional firefighters who are exposed to horrible toxic conditions when batteries catch fire. This settlement action is a step in the right direction, but the broader battery storage fire issue requires additional attention and EPA enforcement."

On May 15, 2024 a fire broke out at the Gateway Energy Storage facility, with periodic flare-ups until May 28. The facility contained approximately 14,796 nickel-manganese-cobalt lithium-ion batteries. EPA is working in coordination with local fire authorities and the County of San Diego to oversee the cleanup effort undertaken by the responsible party.

Fire damaged batteries pose ongoing risks of fire, explosion, and chemical releases. In the agreement being announced today, EPA is requiring comprehensive safety measures and monitoring to protect nearby residents and workers during the cleanup process.

Under the settlement agreement, Gateway Energy Storage must conduct environmental monitoring during all battery handling operations; safely remove, package, and dispose of all impacted battery packs; and submit detailed work plans and progress reports to EPA.

Background

Gateway Energy Storage, LLC operates the facility as a Delaware-incorporated limited liability company. The company is considered a responsible party under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) and must bear the costs of the cleanup.

The root cause of the fire remains under investigation. EPA and local agencies will continue to oversee cleanup activities until all work is completed and the site no longer poses a threat to public health or the environment.

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Learn about EPA's [Pacific Southwest Region](#) [🔗](#). Connect with us on [Facebook](#) [🔗](#), [Instagram](#) [🔗](#), and [X](#) [🔗](#).

Last updated on July 7, 2025

The Otay Mesa BESS fire used nearly 20 million gallons of defensive water spray to attempt to contain the fire and attempt to capture as much smoke, gas, and ash as possible and the resultant contamination level at and around the burned lithium BESS site resulted in the burned-out BESS and surrounding area being categorized as a "Superfund" site by the EPA.
Here's an overview of the fire showing it burned for 17 days:

Overview

Event Details	
Location:	USA, CA, San Diego
Capacity (MWh):	250
Capacity (MWh):	250
Battery Module:	LG Chem
Manufacturer:	LG Energy Solution
Application:	Energy storage
Installation:	
Enclosure Type:	Indoor
Event Date:	15 May 2024
System Age (yr):	3.7
Extent of Damage:	
Status During Accident:	
Description:	The Gateway Energy Storage Facility was involved in a fire, and water was pumped into the building's fire suppression system to extinguish it. A 600-foot safety barrier was maintained for over 22 hours due to air monitors showing high levels of hydrogen. A drone and unmanned robot were used to monitor the fire, measure air quality and take temperature readings, and firefighters opened the building once heat was no longer detected. A shelter in place order and an evacuation warning were sent out as a precaution. The fire was declared extinguished the next day, but required several times until the fire department left the scene nearly 17 days later.
Root Cause:	
Failed Element:	
Source:	The San Diego Union-Tribune
Additional Resources:	https://www.greenfieldmedia.com/articles/health-power-energy/gateway-energy-storage-battery-fire-san-diego-jail-in-time-for-hackers- Greenfield Media The San Diego Tribune: Investigation The San Diego Tribune: Incident Summary

Note: Missing values in this table reflect unknowns.

If you have any details or corrections you would like to contribute to the database please reach out to our [Storage Safety email](#).

Category: Failure Event

Superfund sites are designated based on the level of threat they pose to public health and the environment, and are prioritized for cleanup based on it's assessment.

The Difference Between Superfund Sites and Brownfields

Contaminated sites polluted with harmful materials necessitates intervention for the well-being of the environment and its inhabitants. The [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#) categorizes such polluted sites into two types: "Superfund" and "Brownfield". Superfund sites refer to contaminated areas identified by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as needing urgent and intensive cleanup due to the presence of hazardous waste or pollution. In contrast, brownfields are properties where the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants complicates expansion, redevelopment, or reuse.

A [Superfund site](#) is a location that has been heavily contaminated by hazardous materials, such as chemical waste or toxic substances. These sites are designated as "Superfund" if the federal government is involved or plans to be involved in the cleanup efforts. Many of these sites are listed on the National Priorities List (NPL). Currently, there are over 500 Superfund NPL sites that are either being reused or are already in a protective state for future reuse.

On the other hand, [Brownfield sites](#) refer to properties that may have potential environmental contaminants but can be reused or redeveloped with proper cleanup and management. These sites are often located in urban areas and may have been previously used for commercial or industrial purposes. Unlike Superfund sites, brownfields receive major attention from state and tribal response programs, with a focus on cleaning up and revitalizing these sites. State voluntary cleanup programs play a significant role in facilitating this process.

They determined the burned BESS and remaining toxins/contamination pose an immediate and long term threat to people's health and to the environment.

The Otay Mesa burned BESS site and contaminated surrounding areas is the first burned Lithium BESS to be designated as a Superfund site after a lithium BESS fire- this is additional evidence that lithium BESS are dangerous and can have significant impacts on people and the environment.

Here's a link with more EPA info about the Otay Mesa BESS fire:
<https://semspub.epa.gov/src/collection/09/AR67825>

We need you to accept that lithium BESS pose significant dangers that will have significant impacts on the environment and people nearby and we need you to push to have state level laws that protect people and the environment from lithium BESS as thermal runaway and fires are unpreventable and unextinguishable and release toxic smoke, gases, and ash...

There are dozens of lithium BESS developers seeking land to build hundreds of lithium BESS (two examples BESS developers are proposing lithium BESS in horrible locations are Covington next to Mattson Middle School and in Sedro Woolley next to Hansen Creek which just had 10s of Millions spent to restore Salmon breeding habitat) so they can buy our cheap electricity and export it to CA and other states for massive profits- while putting our people and environment at risk of having to deal with Superfund sites.

And, please consider all the evidence I have shared- as well as others- that show lithium BESS are not safe and should be very carefully sited far away from sensitive environments/locations like next to Mattson Middle School in Covington and next to Hanson Creek in Sedro Woolley and please protect our citizens and the environment and consider adopting an internal policy that requires lithium BESS cannot be within 5 miles of a school, hospital, homes, sensitive locations, nor sensitive environments.

We all know we need energy storage- but with the latest news about the EPA declaring a lithium BESS fire site a Superfund site should be all the proof you need to take the appropriate actions to prevent future Superfund sites in WA state- then add in all the irrefutable scientific evidence from the Jan 2025 Lithium BESS fire at Moss landing showing over 1000x increases and toxic levels of lithium battery related heavy metals, and there is absolutely no denying that lithium BESS should all be given an environmental impact determination of significance.

Please don't hesitate to ask any questions!

Thank you!

My Best,

James