

## Caring for the Environment

*First National Battery's sign off line is "Through Caring We Lead". An easily understandable motto, but for those with a fascination and passion for words, like ABR whose slogan is "Words in Action", "through caring we lead" can take on a new dimension when considering the environment. First National Battery cares and FNB recycles lead – get it? ABR salutes this commitment to the environment, and in this article we borrow from FNB's pamphlet on lead recycling.*

Recycling has become an extremely important consideration in modern business not only from the recovery aspect of valuable materials but also from an ecological and environmental protection aspect. Trends overseas are moving towards motor companies developing recyclable motor vehicles. In Michigan USA a laboratory known as the Vehicle Recycling Development Centre aims to teach automotive companies how to better design cars for easier dismantling by allowing easier access to key parts for future removal. The new trend is to "design for disassembly". The goal is to close the production loop to conceive, develop and build a product with a long-term view of how its components can be refurbished and reused or disposed of safely. This situation gives use to the need and concept of recycling.

The local battery industry has understood this for many years, and as such are environmentally responsible, ensuring that so-called scrap batteries are recycled, and thus displaying a social investment in the future of sound ecological management. The procedure is for all scrap batteries to be retrieved on a one on one basis at the point of sale, and for these scrap batteries to be returned to First National Battery. The batteries are then recycled at the First National Battery factory, in their advanced Smelter Division, whereby the materials are recycled for use in the manufacturing of new batteries. Scrap batteries are processed to the point where the polypropylene components are returned for cleaning, granulating and eventual reprocessing. The scrap lead plates and terminals are stockpiled for refining. All electrolyte, which by the time the battery is scrapped has a low relative density, is collected and neutralised before being processed in First National Battery's effluent plant. The precipitate are disposed of into a licenced waste system. FNB says that some of the major benefits of having their own smelter include:

- Active contribution to positive ecological benefits
- More control over quality
- Continuity of supply
- Relatively high recovery rate of lead from scrap
- Able to reprocess dross and filtered materials
- Conservation of natural resources

All these factors are well and good but the lead industry more than any other has been subject to adverse publicity regarding environmental problems and legislative pressures to solve them. Anti-pollution controls have been implemented sometimes at very high cost. Several sets of legislation are in force including the Atmospheric Pollution Prevention Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Water Act. Further, as the manufacture of batteries involves lead companies such as FNB are required to be registered in terms of the manufacturing process and have to hold all the necessary permits. First National Battery's investment in a smelter has therefore blended well with their

commitment to the recycling of batteries. This is only a part of their long-term capital expansion programme which, to date, has seen an improvement in production control product quality and increased production capabilities. Further investments are planned for the next few years which will enable FNB to position itself to take advantage of the current downturn in the South African economy.

So there you have it. When it comes to battery recycling, South Africa takes a back seat to no one. A “pluimpie” to First National Battery. Al Gore would be proud of you.