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Consumers Association of Penang
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Letter to the Editor

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E-scooters and e-bikes can be ticking time-bombs

It was reported in early September that the Electrical Safety First commissioned the Building Research Establishment (BRE) fire safety research team in the United Kingdom (UK) carried out tests into lithium-ion battery fires to determine the dangers of lithium-ion batteries used in e-scooters and e-bikes. The results showed the explosive nature of lithium-ion batteries resulting in what is known as 'thermal runaway'.

Four persons in the UK were killed from lithium-ion battery fires in the first three months of this year alone. In other cases, people were hospitalised or seriously injured and caused extensive damage to property.

The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) urges the government to regulate e-mobility products whose various serious safety issues ranging from their manufacturing to their use have been examined and identified by BRE.

In Malaysia, micro-mobility vehicles are defined as "any vehicle that is propelled by electrical means, an internal-combustion engine or human power or a combination of electrical means, an internal-combustion engine or human power, and having a maximum speed of 50 km/h".

Out of the broad range of micro-mobility vehicles, BRE only tested on e-scooters and e-bikes as there was an alarming increase in number of fatalities, injuries and devastating fires from these vehicles.

It is timely for the BRE study to be made public because it can serve as a lesson for Malaysia to learn because e-scooters and e-bikes are also an emerging trend here and preventive measures can be taken before lithium-ion battery fires become a problem.

SIRIM and the Malaysian Energy Commission need to address the design and lithium battery safety aspects of e-scooters and e-bikes in the country based on the recommendations forwarded by BRE.

Lithium-ion battery fires are known for its intensity, explosions, and the production of toxic fumes. Fires can be caused by poor quality design and/or manufacturing defects that cause short circuits. The report also warned about the online availability of do-it-yourself (DIY) e-bikes conversion kits.

The full report is available at the Electrical Safety First website:

https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/sgyikuwb/esf_batterybreakdown_report_2023_v7_-final.pdf

We reiterate our call to the government to look into the design of e-scooters and e-bikes and other safety aspects that might endanger the lives of the users.

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