

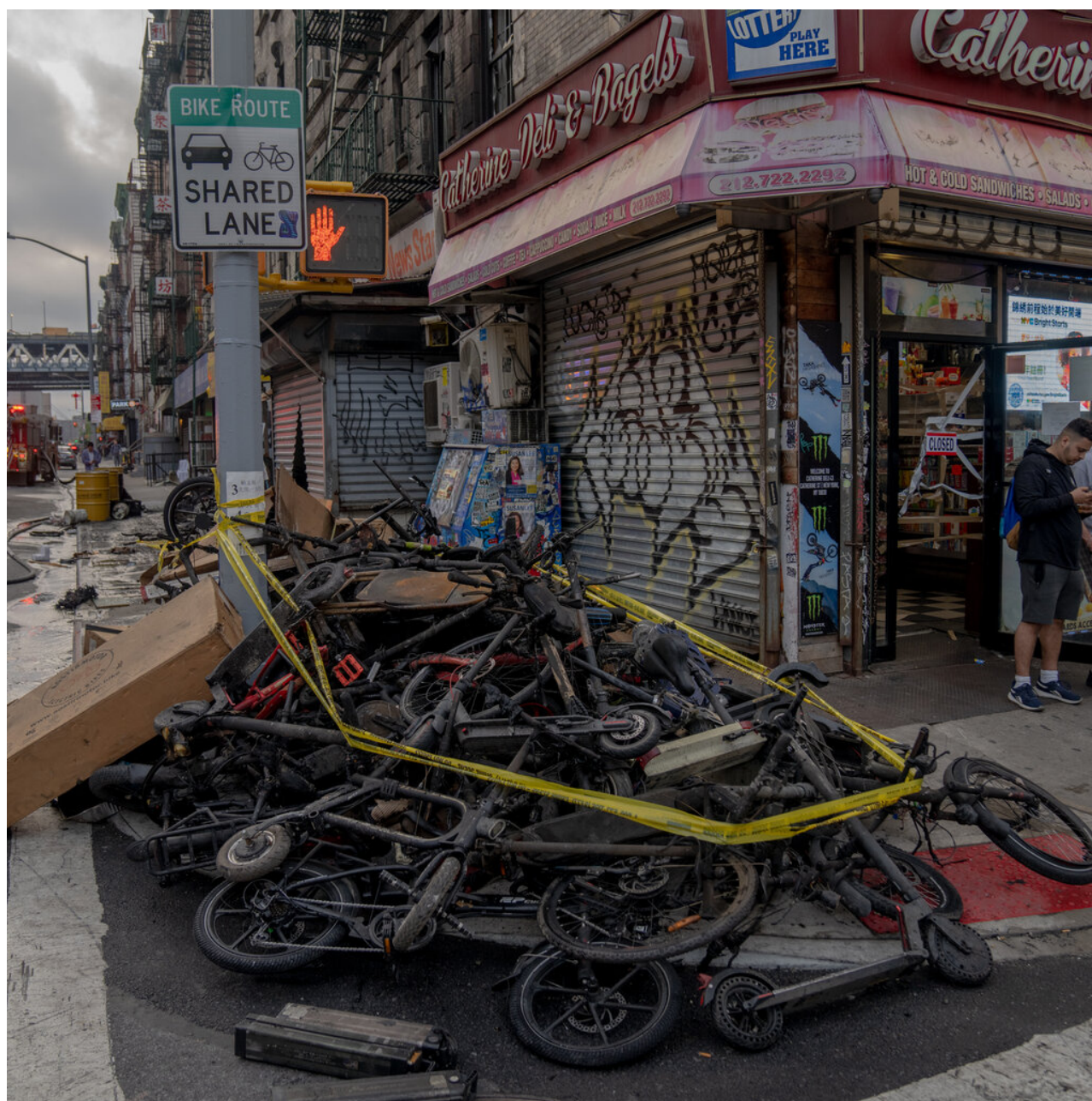
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It's Wednesday. Fires sparked by e-bike and e-scooter batteries are increasing in San Francisco. Plus, the Vallejo Police Department is running out of officers.



Charred bicycles and scooters from a fire at an e-bike repair store last month in Manhattan. Amir Hamja/The New York Times

Two people jumped out of an apartment complex window in the Tenderloin neighborhood of San Francisco to escape a fire that was spreading in their unit on Monday. One of them was seriously injured and taken to a hospital burn center, officials said.

That terrifying blaze was probably caused by an overheated e-scooter battery that firefighters later spotted plugged in to a charger near the unit's front door, according to Capt. Jonathan Baxter, a spokesman for the San Francisco Fire Department. It was the 24th fire in San Francisco this year that has been linked to rechargeable batteries, he told me.

The city isn't alone. Fires associated with rechargeable batteries have had [a devastating effect](#) in New York City, ripping through buildings including public housing complexes and luxury towers — and have killed more than 20 people there since 2021.

“Fortunately, we're not seeing it to that same degree here in San Francisco,” Baxter told me. “However, one fire is one too many.”

Battery-related fires have increased steadily in San Francisco as e-bikes and e-scooters have proliferated in recent years. According to the Fire Department, there have been 202 battery fires in the city since 2017, killing one person and injuring eight. Fifty-eight of them broke out last year, up from 13 in 2017, and this year is on a pace to equal or exceed 2022.

The figures include fires linked to rechargeable batteries used in e-scooters and e-bikes (the most common culprits) as well as electric cars, motorcycles and skateboards.

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While dozens of structures have been damaged, a majority of the fires have erupted at homeless encampments, where, Baxter told me, people are probably tinkering with electric scooters and other vehicles in ways that make them more likely to burst into flames.

As my colleagues in New York have [reported](#), off-market, refurbished, damaged or improperly charged lithium-ion batteries can explode, igniting fast-moving fires that are difficult to extinguish. Lithium-ion batteries are also used in computers and cellphones, but so-called micro-mobility vehicle batteries are bigger and tend to be damaged by a lot of wear and tear, experts say.

“All it takes is for one small battery cell to be defective, overcharged or damaged, and a tremendous amount of energy is released in the form of heat and toxic flammable gases all at once,” Daniel Murray, the New York Fire Department's chief of hazmat operations, told The New York Times.

E-bikes and e-scooters are less regulated than electric cars, which start fewer fires even though they require far more energy. Hoping to get ahead of the fire problem, New York will [ban the sale](#) of e-bikes and similar devices that do not meet recognized safety standards, starting in September; it's the first American

city to do that.

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Officials in San Francisco are [warning](#) residents not to charge e-bikes or e-scooters while they are asleep, or to use any charging device other than those made by the bike or scooter's manufacturer. And they say that if a battery fire does erupt in your home, don't try to put it out yourself — you probably can't. Instead, evacuate right away and call 911.

[Read more](#) e-bike and e-scooter safety tips from the National Fire Protection Association.



Gov. Gavin Newsom announcing a solar-energy infrastructure project in May. John G Mabanglo/EPA, via Shutterstock

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