

The Huge Difference a Little Light Bulb Can Make

These days, there is a lot of talk about saving energy (and money). Of the many things that can be done at home and at work, one of the easiest ways to save both energy and money is to change your incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent lights (CFLs).

CFLs use about 75% less energy and last ten to thirteen times longer than incandescent bulbs. They also produce about 75% less heat as compared to an incandescent light, where 90% of the energy consumed is wasted heat. Over the life of a CFL you can save about \$30.00 or more in electricity costs. “If every American home replaced just one light bulb with an ENERGY STAR qualified bulb, we would save **enough energy to light more than 3 million homes for a year**, more than **\$600 million in annual energy costs**, and prevent greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions of more than **800,000 cars.**” (www.energystar.gov)

While CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, the highest amount of mercury in the air comes from burning fossil fuels such as coal, which is the most common fuel used in the United States to produce electricity. “A power plant will emit ten milligrams (mg) of mercury to produce electricity to run an incandescent lamp compared to only 2.4 mg of mercury to run a CFL for the same time. Every CFL can keep more than 400 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions out of the atmosphere.” (www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling)

When fluorescent light bulbs are recycled, virtually all parts are used. The metal ends, glass tubes, mercury, and phosphor powder are all separated and reused. There are many ways of disposing of CFLs. In Ontario County you can call 585.396.4482 to find out when there will be a hazardous household waste collection. In Monroe County you can call 585.753.7600 to make an appointment for a drop off. For other areas, visit www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling and click on “Where you live”. There are many local counties and phone numbers listed to help you dispose of your used CFL properly. If there is no special way of recycling a CFL for where you live, place it in a plastic bag and seal the bag before placing it in the garbage. Never send a fluorescent light bulb or any product containing mercury to an incineration plant.

While the amount of mercury in a CFL is only as big as the head of a pen, these precautions should be taken if one breaks in your home:

- Have people and pets leave the room, being careful not to step on the broken pieces.
- Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.
- Shut off the central forced air heating/cooling system to your home.

For clean-up on hard surfaces:

- Carefully scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jug with a metal lid or a sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape (duct tape) to pick remaining small glass fragments and powder and then wipe the area clean with a damp paper towel or disposable wet wipes. Place the tape and wipes in the same glass jar or plastic bag.
- DO NOT use a broom or vacuum to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

For clean-up on carpeting or rugs:

- Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with a metal lid or a sealable plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape (duct tape) to pick up the remaining small glass fragments and powder.
- If vacuuming is needed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken and then place the vacuum bag in a sealed plastic bag. If your vacuum is a canister type that does not use bags, wipe the canister clean with a damp paper towel and dispose of that with the broken CFL.

Although the use of CFLs may require some precautions, their benefits far outweigh the risks. Their extended life and greatly reduced energy consumption, as compared to standard incandescent light bulbs, make them a smart choice; the right choice for your wallet and our environment.

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