

Compact Fluorescent Light Bulb Disposal

Most members have several lamps and light fixtures which have compact fluorescent lights (CFLs). An average of five milligrams of mercury is contained in each CFL and no mercury is released when the bulbs are intact or in use.

CFLs save money, use less electricity and help promote energy efficiency. Switching from traditional light bulbs to CFLs is an effective, accessible change every American can make to save energy and help the environment. What if a CFL bulb breaks or burns out? Is the amount of mercury in the bulb harmful? How would I clean it up safely? The Environmental Protection Agency's Web site gives these suggestions:

How do you clean up a broken CFL?

According to the EPA, the greatest risk if a bulb breaks is getting cut from the glass shards. Research indicates that there is no immediate health risk to people should a bulb break if it is cleaned up properly:

- Sweep up, do not vacuum, the glass fragments and particles.
- Place the broken pieces in a sealed plastic bag and wipe the area with a damp paper towel to pick up any remaining stray shards or particles. Put the paper towel in the sealed plastic bag when you are finished.
- If weather permits, open the windows and ventilate the room to remove any mercury exposed to the air.

What should you do with a CFL when it burns out?

Like paint, batteries, thermostats and other hazardous items, CFLs should be disposed of properly. The EPA is working with CFL manufacturers and U.S. retailers to expand disposal options. You can search for disposal options online by using your zip code at www.earth911.com, calling (877) EARTH-911 or visiting www.lamprecycle.org. Currently, Home Depot stores located throughout the Fredericksburg and Richmond areas offer CFL recycling and disposal.

Also, check with your local waste management agency. If a disposal site is not available in your area, the EPA suggests placing the burned-out or broken bulb in a plastic bag, which should be sealed before being placed in the trash.

The benefits of CFLs greatly outweigh the risks. “There is only a very small amount of mercury in CFLs, hardly enough to worry about,” said Jim Stine, senior principal, Environmental Policy Department for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. “Compare that to 3,000 milligrams of mercury in older thermostats and 500 milligrams of mercury in a mercury thermometer.”

If every home in America replaced just one incandescent light bulb with a CFL, we would save enough energy to light more than three million homes and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to that of 800,000 cars.

Sources: Environmental Protection Agency, ENERGY STAR[®] and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association