



Household Compact Fluorescent Lamp Use and Disposal

Hazardous Waste Program fact sheet

7/2008

Why use Compact Fluorescent Lamps?

Compact fluorescent lamps or CFLs, are an important step in the conservation of energy. CFLs are safe to use and last up to 10 times longer than standard light bulbs. These bulbs use far less energy than conventional incandescent bulbs and provide consumers significant savings in electrical bills. By using less energy, utility companies will burn less fossil fuel, which reduces greenhouse gasses and mercury emitted into the air. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program, if every American home replaced just one standard incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent lamp it would reduce greenhouses gasses equivalent to the emissions of 800,000 cars. For more information regarding the benefits of using compact fluorescent lamps visit the department's Web site at www.dnr.mo.gov/pubs/pub105.pdf or www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls.

Can compact fluorescent lamps be recycled?

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources recommends recycling in lieu of disposal. Some retail stores that sell CFLs have recently started accepting them for recycling. Check with your local retailer about this option. You also may be able to take the lamps to a Household Hazardous Waste collection center or event. However, there are only a few Household Hazardous Waste collection sites in the state and only some of those may accept fluorescent lamps. If there is a permanent facility or collection event scheduled in your area, contact them about recycling CFLs. You can find a list of facilities and events on the department's Web site at www.dnr.mo.gov/env/swmp/hhw/hhw.htm. Several Solid Waste Management Districts also conduct household hazardous waste collection events throughout the year. Visit www.dnr.mo.gov/env/swmp/swmd/swmdinfo.htm and contact your local district to find an event near you.

How can I safely dispose of compact fluorescent lamps?

It is currently legal for households to dispose of CFLs with their household trash. The department recommends that the bulbs be sealed in a zipper type plastic bag before being disposed. The amount of mercury contained in each bulb is very small, approximately five milligrams or about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. This amount of mercury is less than the amount found in conventional fluorescent bulbs. However, there is a potential for exposure to mercury if the bulb breaks during handling.

What do I do if I accidentally break a compact fluorescent lamps?

- First, ventilate the area by opening a window or door. You should evacuate the area for 15 minutes before cleaning up the broken bulb. If possible, elevate the room temperature to make ventilation more effective. Your primary hazard in dealing with a broken CFL bulb is the potential for cuts from the broken glass, not the small amount of mercury.
- Keep people and pets away from the breakage area until the cleanup is complete.

- To clean up a broken CFL bulb from a hard surface, wear disposable gloves to protect your hands from the sharp glass. Scoop up the broken pieces using a piece of cardboard or stiff paper such as playing cards or index cards, and place the pieces and cards in a secure closed container such as a glass container with a metal screw top or a zipper type plastic bag. Then pat the area with the sticky side of duct tape, packing tape or masking tape to pick up fine particles. Finally, take a wet paper towel or a wet wipe and wipe the area to pick up even finer particles. Place the paper towel and gloves in the same secure closed container.
- To clean up a broken CFL bulb from a carpeted area, wear disposable gloves to protect your hands from the sharp glass. Pick up as many of the glass pieces as possible and place in a secure closed container such as a glass container with a metal screw top or a zipper type plastic bag. Use the sticky side of duct tape, packing tape or masking tape to pick up small shards and any remaining powder and place the tape in the secure closed container. Finally, take a wet paper towel or a wet wipe, and wipe the area to pick up even finer particles. Again, place the towel and gloves in the same secure, closed container.
- Do not use a vacuum cleaner to clean up the breakage. This will spread the mercury vapor and dust throughout the area and could potentially contaminate the vacuum. If it is necessary to vacuum the area, wait a day to allow the mercury vapors to escape, and open the window when you vacuum to provide good ventilation. Homeowners may consider removing throw rugs or the area of carpeting where the breakage occurred as a precaution, particularly if the rug is in an area frequented by infants, small children or pregnant women.
- If your secure closed container is not glass, but a zipper type plastic bag, place the entire closed plastic bag inside a second zipper type plastic bag, seal and then place in your outdoor trash container for landfill disposal.
- Continue ventilating the room for several hours.
- Wash your hands and face.
- The next time you replace a lamp, consider putting a drop cloth on the floor so that any accidental breakage can be easily cleaned up. If consumers remain concerned regarding safety, they may consider not using fluorescent lamps in situations where they could easily be broken. Consumers may also consider avoiding CFL usage in bedrooms or carpeted areas frequented by infants, small children, or pregnant women. Finally, consider not storing many used/spent lamps before recycling or disposing, as that may increase your chances of breakage.

For More Information

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Missouri Department of Natural Resources
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