

CFLs: Handle With Care

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We've all heard about the environmental benefits of using compact fluorescent light bulbs. But did you know these bulbs have a neurotoxin in them that can cause health and environmental problems?

(WUSA) -- We've all heard about the environmental benefits of using compact fluorescent light bulbs, not to mention the cost savings. According to Consumer Reports, "The average house has 45 lights. Changing just five often-used regular bulbs to CFLs can save you about \$25 per year on electricity."

What many people don't realize is CFLs have a small amount of mercury in them. Mercury is essential in firing up a CFL. Mercury is also a potent neurotoxin. Which means it can cause all sorts of health problems, such as memory loss and learning disabilities.

This means people need to handle CFLs with particular care.

Inevitably a CFL will break or burn out. There are special steps you need to take in both instances.

If a CFL breaks, the Environmental Protection Agency's advice is to:

- Open a window immediately and leave the room for 15 minutes.
- Carefully scoop up the fragments and powder with stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a double-sealed plastic bag.
- Use disposable rubber gloves and wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes and place them in the plastic bag as well.

Richard Dimont, Program Manager for Hazardous Waste and Waste Management in Montgomery County, advises using a soapy water solution using dandruff shampoo. Dimont says dandruff shampoos contain zinc and sulfur, which mercury likes to bond to.

- Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

If a CFL breaks on a rug or carpet, first remove all materials you can without using a vacuum cleaner, following the steps above. Sticky tape, such as duct tape, can be used to pick up small pieces and powder.

If vacuuming is needed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken, remove the vacuum bag and put the bag and vacuum debris in two sealed plastic bags.

- You should not throw the double-sealed plastic bags away in the regular trash. Instead, you need to bring them to a hazardous waste facility. If you put the broken CFLs in the regular trash, the mercury elements can seep into the soil and groundwater at the dump or go airborne when burned in a trash facility's incinerator.

Speaking of hazardous waste facilities, whether you break a bulb or need to throw a whole one away, after it burns out, all

CFLs should go to a hazardous waste facility.

The mercury in a CFL can be recycled into other mercury products/other CFLs.

Here are some sites where you can dispose of your CFLs:

Virginia

- Water Pollution Control Plant, 3155 S. Fern Street, Arlington, VA 703-228-6832
- I-66 Transfer Station Complex, 4618 West Ox Road, Fairfax, VA 703-631-1179

Maryland

- Shady Grove Solid Waste Transfer Station in Montgomery County, 16101 Frederick Road, Derwood, MD 240-777-6410
- Brown Station Road Sanitary Landfill in Prince George's County, 11611 White House Road, Upper Marlboro, MD 301-952-7625
- Chevy Chase residents can call 301-654-7300 and schedule a curbside hazardous waste pickup.
- Rockville residents can call 240-314-8568 and schedule a curbside hazardous waste pickup.

District

- Eco-Green Living, 1469 Church Street, NW 202-234-7110

Residents in other jurisdictions can search by zip code for a hazardous waste facility near them. All you have to do is go to www.earth911.org and type in your zip code.

Proponents of CFLs say consumers should not freak out about the mercury in the bulbs. They remind everyone, coal-fired power plants are the largest man-made source of mercury. More mercury is released into the environment making regular light bulbs than there is mercury in a CFL.

Are CFL's perfect? No. But as Mike Tidwell, a Takoma Park environmentalist and CFL user says, "Letting the perfect get in the way of the great, should not be an option."



[Click HERE To Watch The Energy It Takes To Power A CFL Versus An Incandescent Light Bulb](#)

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