

INFORMATION ABOUT FLUORESCENT AND COMPACT FLUORESCENT BULBS – UPDATED 11/18/08

Question: Please tell me where I can dispose of fluorescent and compact fluorescent bulbs.

Answer:

Thank you for your question about where you can dispose of fluorescent bulbs and compact fluorescent lamps. Here's some information about disposal and recycling options for fluorescent bulbs.

Disposal:

Under current Maryland regulations, unless you have a large volume of bulbs or are a business and considered a generator of hazardous waste, you can legally dispose of fluorescent bulbs in your trash without breaking any rules or regulations. Maryland passed legislation recently requiring recycling or special disposal for entities with a large quantity of bulbs. This only applies to the bulbs that fail a certain test, known as TCLP* (Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure). The threshold for the requirement is weight based (200 kg) and therefore varies depending on the type(s) of bulb(s). For 4 foot T12 type bulbs, the threshold is 720 bulbs.

** Per MDE staff via email 2/9/2007: Manufacturers use green colored end caps to designate bulbs they have tested and found not to exhibit the toxicity characteristic (so, assuming the manufacturer's test results are valid, a bulb with green end caps could be discarded as regular trash). A lamp manufacturer may also have posted test results for the toxicity characteristic for its lamps on the manufacturer's website - look for "TCLP test results" or similar terms. (TCLP stands for toxicity characteristic leaching procedure).*

Related information can be found at:

- Frequently Asked Questions About... Compact fluorescent light bulbs
http://www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/CFL_Q_A.pdf
- Fluorescent Light Recyclers http://www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/CFL_recyclers.pdf
- Statement on CFLs and Mercury
http://www.mde.state.md.us/assets/document/CFLs_Mercury_Statement_021308.pdf
- The Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) for this matter can be read at:
<http://www.dsd.state.md.us/comar/26/26.13.10.26.htm>

Recycling:

Home Depot & Ikea accept compact fluorescent bulbs (CFL).

If you prefer to recycle the bulbs, there are several options that are typically available at a cost.

There is a fairly extensive list of lamp recycling companies at <http://lamprecycle.org/>

The link below is for a recycling directory at the category for fluorescent bulbs.

<http://www.mdrecycles.org/recyclingDirectory.asp?sec=fluorescentLamps>

Some companies in the lists above, and other companies, offer "Pre-Paid Return Packages".

On several occasions, for special projects, the Midshore Regional Recycling Program has hand delivered bulbs directly to this company (listed in directory above) .

USA Lights/Environmental Preservation Associates

12036 Old Baltimore Pike
Beltsville, MD 20705
PHONE: (301) 699-6244
FAX: (301) 937-4299

Infinity Recycling (1-800-475-5949), a local recycling company, lists fluorescent bulbs on their website, <http://www.infinityrecycling.org/offices.htm>. We encourage you to contact them directly to confirm if they are currently accepting bulbs and any terms.

Some states, such as MA and CA, ban the disposal of fluorescent bulbs. One of the reasons is concern about mercury released from waste incinerators. As you may be aware, waste in the Midshore region is disposed at landfills. There are three waste incinerators in MD, in Baltimore City, Montgomery County and Harford County. There has been increasing awareness about mercury containing products. Maryland previously banned the sale of mercury thermometers and recently banned the sale of mercury thermostats. Mercury thermometers and thermostats contain much more mercury than fluorescent bulbs.

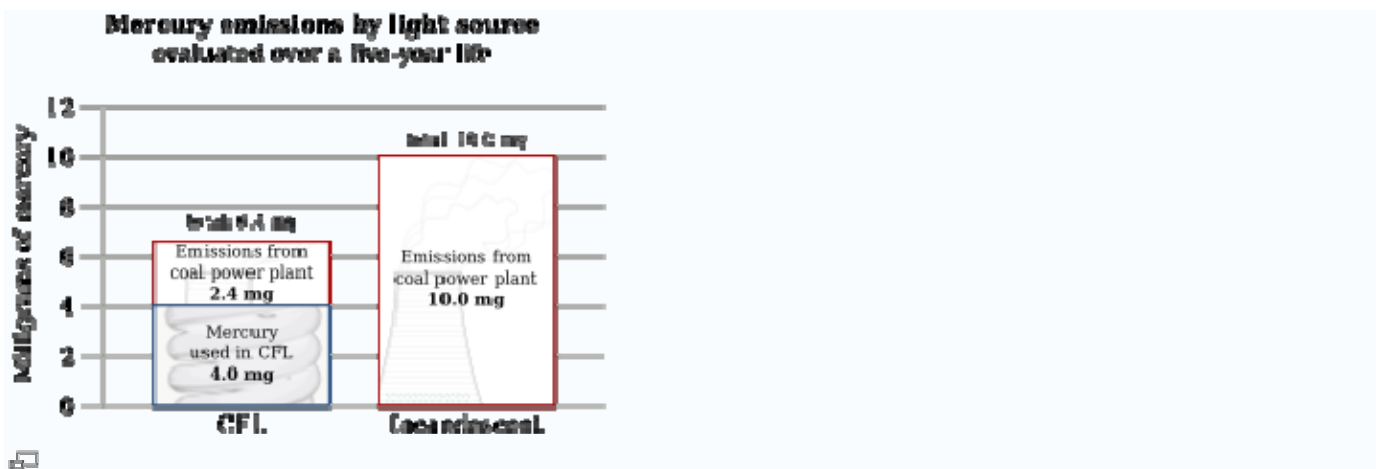
Information about mercury is available from <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/about.htm> .

There has been increasing interest in fluorescent lighting due to the significant energy saving over incandescent lighting. A large retailer surpassed a goal to sell 100 million CFL's in 2007 (<http://www.walmartfacts.com/articles/5328.aspx>). The company also announced reduced levels of mercury in CFLs (<http://www.walmartfacts.com/articles/5018.aspx>) While the company did hold a one day recycling collection of fluorescent bulbs in 2007 in several states (<http://www.walmartfacts.com/articles/5124.aspx>), it has been noted this program only captured a small percentage of the discarded product (<http://earth911.org/blog/2007/04/01/walmart-to-host-fluorescent-light-bulb-collections/#comments>).

Another approach some facilities have taken is to crush the bulbs on site in an enclosed container. There have been some safety concerns raised about these units. See the cautionary information at <http://www.govlink.org/hazwaste/mercury/lampsCrushing.html>. One study (<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/eh/hazardous/topics/drumtop.pdf>) had this finding:

Based on test measurements and the concerns noted above, Minnesota has determined that the use of drum top lamp crushers is not protective of human health and the environment and is not allowing their use.

One source of information that may be of interest is : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compact_fluorescent_lamp
The energy savings benefits of CFL's are explained. The graph shows that mercury is reduced for locales where power comes from coal powered power plants, such as Delmarva.



An article in Popular Mechanics may also be of interest.
http://www.popularmechanics.com/blogs/home_journal_news/4217864.html

Thank you for your inquiry. This question comes up periodically. We will continue to follow the Maryland regulations mentioned above and welcome new information about this topic. As you may know, twice a year the Midshore Region holds a Household Hazardous Waste Collection event in the four Midshore Counties served (see www.midshorerecycling.org). Currently fluorescent bulbs are not accepted at these collections. You may want to check the website prior to each event for any new information including what materials will be accepted.

We hope this information is helpful.

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