

# Mercury in Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs)

## Are they really worth the extra money?

Compared with regular incandescent light bulbs CFLs offer many benefits.

- Save energy - Use 1/3 of the energy of a standard incandescent light
- Convenient - Last up to 10 times longer
- Save an average of \$30 or more in energy costs over its lifetime
- Prevent 450 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions over its lifetime
- CFLs produce 70% less heat and can help cut energy costs from home cooling.



## Is it true that CFLs contain mercury?

Yes, mercury is an essential and irreplaceable element for most energy-efficient light bulbs, including CFLs. The health risks associated with mercury exposure have led manufacturers to reduce the amount of mercury used in fluorescent lighting products. CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing, roughly enough to cover the tip of a ball point pen (5mg).

## Are there any special precautions for use of CFLs at home?

CFLs are safe to use in your home. No mercury is released when the bulbs are in use. Always screw and unscrew the bulb at its base and never forcefully twist a CFL into a light socket by its glass tubes.

## What do I do with a CFL once it burns out?

CFLs for your home are not considered hazardous waste, according to federal and state rules. Still, CFLs should not be tossed in the regular garbage if preferred options exist, such as recycling centers or Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) facilities. Please check with your local recycling center or HHW facility for disposal options. If your local recycling center or HHW facility does not accept CFLs and regular trash is your only option, seal the used CFL in two plastic bags and place it in the regular trash.

## What if I break a CFL in my home or business?

EPA is continually reviewing its clean-up and disposal recommendations for CFLs to ensure that the Agency presents the most up-to-date information for consumers and businesses. Maine's Department of Environmental Protection released a CFL breakage study report on February 25, 2008. EPA has conducted an initial review of this study and, as a result of this review, updated the CFL cleanup instructions on the back of this sheet.

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# What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Bulb Breaks

## **Before Cleanup of Hard Surfaces or Carpet: Ventilate the Room**

1. Open a windows to ventilate and leave the room, restricting access for 15 minutes.
2. Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system.

## **Clean-Up Steps for Hard Surfaces**

3. Carefully scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with metal lid or in a sealed plastic bag.
4. Use sticky tape (such as duct tape) to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
5. Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes and place them in the glass jar or plastic bag.
6. Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

## **Clean-Up Steps for Carpeting or Rug**

7. Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with metal lid or in a sealed plastic bag.
8. Use sticky tape (such as duct tape) to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
9. If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken.
7. Remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister), and put the bag or vacuum debris in a sealed plastic bag.

## **Preferred Disposal of Clean-up Materials**

11. Immediately place all cleanup materials outside the house/building in a trash container or outdoor protected area for the next normal trash pick-up. If your local recycling center or HHW accepts CFLs, please take clean-up materials to one of these locations for disposal.
12. Wash your hands after disposing of the jars or plastic bags containing clean-up materials.

## **Future Cleaning of Carpeting or Rug: Ventilate the Room During and After Vacuuming**

13. The next several times you vacuum, shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system and open a window prior to vacuuming.
14. Keep the central heating/air conditioning system shut off and the window open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is completed.



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