

Q&A: Compact Fluorescent Lighting



Why use CFLs?

Lighting takes energy and money, accounting for five to 10 percent of residential electricity consumption among cooperative members. Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) use up to 75 percent less electricity than incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer, helping to reduce the costs associated with lighting.



What about mercury and CFLs?

CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury, sealed within the glass tubing—an average of four milligrams. That's about the amount that would cover the tip of a ballpoint pen. By comparison, older thermometers contain about 500 milligrams of mercury—an amount equal to the mercury in 125 CFLs. Because most of the mercury vapor within a CFL becomes bound to the inside of the bulb as it is used, only about 11 percent, or 0.44 milligrams, of the mercury remains free in the CFL at the end of its life.

What is the proper disposal of a CFL?

Because CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, the Environmental Protection Agency recommends the following clean-up and disposal methods:

If a CFL burns out:

Recycle used CFLs if you have the option. If recycling is not an option, seal the CFL in two plastic bags and dispose of it at your local household hazardous waste collection site or place it with your regular trash.

If a CFL breaks:

Do not use a vacuum, broom, or your hands. Open nearby windows and leave the room for 15 minutes. Sweep up any fragments with a piece of cardboard or stiff paper. Use tape to pick up any remaining pieces. Wipe area with damp paper towels. Seal everything in two plastic bags and place the bags outside with your regular trash.

Never burn used or broken CFLs.

Find more information on the use and disposal of CFLs at www.energystar.gov.

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