

Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs

Safety and Recycling



There are a few important things you should know about compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).

Very small quantities of mercury* are found in all fluorescent light bulbs, including CFLs as well as the types of fluorescent lights that have been in use in offices, schools, commercial and retail establishments, and residential basements for decades.

- CFLs contain a tiny amount of mercury, typically 1/100th the amount found in old-fashioned mercury fever thermometers.
- CFLs provide important benefits in reduced energy use (and lower energy costs), reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and reduced local air pollution from electric power generation.
- Unbroken CFLs pose no threat of mercury exposure.

Important Tips

- Always handle CFLs carefully to prevent breakage and refrain from using CFLs in lamps that might be easily knocked over, or in unprotected fixtures where bulbs are particularly at risk of being broken in the presence of young children, as in play spaces.
- If a CFL breaks, open doors and windows, turn off air circulation systems and have people and pets leave the room for 15 minutes. For information about safe clean-up procedures, see <http://mass.gov/dep/toxics/stypes/brkncfls.htm>
- If you want to discard an intact CFL that has burned out, it needs to be recycled. A list of local recycling centers in Massachusetts is available at <http://mass.gov/dep/toxics/stypes/cflrlocs.pdf>. As of May 1, 2008 Massachusetts law prohibits disposal of products containing mercury, including CFLs, with household trash. See <http://mass.gov/dep/toxics/stypes/hglamps.htm>

For more information contact the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection at 617-292-5500 or 866-9-MERCURY. For health related questions call the Bureau of Environmental Health at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 617-624-5757. A comprehensive report by the Mercury Policy Project can be found at www.mercurypolicy.org.



*Mercury is an element, found naturally in the environment, that has been used in a variety of household and other products such as thermostats, thermometers and switches. It can be toxic to humans even in small quantities. Massachusetts law prohibits the disposal of products containing mercury with household trash. For information on mercury sources, visit www.epa.gov/mercury.

The information in this Fact Sheet is based on communications from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Massachusetts Division of Energy Resources and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.