

MailOnline

'We will not pick up toxic new bulbs': Councils say energy-saving lights are too dangerous for binmen

By [George Arbuthnott](#)

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Fears: One of the low-energy lightbulbs that are classed as 'hazardous waste'

Councils across the UK are refusing to pick up low-energy lightbulbs from homes as they contain toxic mercury, which gives off poisonous vapours.

But confused consumers are putting the new bulbs – classed as hazardous waste – in their dustbins when they burn out, potentially putting the safety of thousands of binmen at risk.

Previously, the public disposed of traditional lightbulbs, used in Britain for 120 years, in a domestic bin.

However, they are being phased out under a European Union ruling and are being replaced with energy-saving bulbs, many of which contain mercury.

Last night UNISON, the union which represents thousands of rubbish collectors across Britain, said it was concerned at the risks binmen are facing.

A spokeswoman said: 'We are worried as most people do not know these bulbs are not to be put in dustbins. The Government is not doing enough to make people aware of the risks.'

The most common types of low-energy bulbs are known as 'compact fluorescent lamps'.

A study by Germany's Federal Environment Agency found that when one of them breaks, it emits levels of toxic vapour up to 20 times higher than the safe guideline limit for an indoor area.

If a bulb is smashed, the UK's Health Protection Agency advice is for householders to evacuate the room and leave it to ventilate for 15 minutes.

People are also advised to wear protective gloves while wiping the area of the break with a damp cloth and picking up fragments of glass – which should be placed in a plastic bag and sealed.

The advice then states the lightbulb should be taken to a council dump and placed in a special recycling bank because councils do not collect hazardous waste.

The Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs confirmed many councils will not collect the bulbs. A spokesman said last night: 'If a low-energy lightbulb breaks, the mercury contained in it does not pose a health risk to anyone exposed.'

Last week a Mail on Sunday survey revealed the lightbulb market had been thrown into chaos since the traditional bulbs began to be phased out.

We found it was almost impossible to find a direct replacement for old-style lightbulbs from the vast array of bulbs of different shapes and sizes, power and prices now on offer.

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Lovely to see the 'elf-n-safety' jobsworth greeny pc lefty beardy-weirdies caught out by their very own nonsense.

- Roger, England, 06/3/2011 10:37

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I contacted Colchester Borough Council last year regarding the disposal of said light bulb - being transferred to several Departments - no one knew what I was talking about, why I was bothering them, or what to do with it. As if I had lost my marbles, I was TOLD to put it in with the refuse as I had always done in the past..... say no more

- Dumbledor, Essex, 06/3/2011 10:35

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Sorry but no recycling centre within reach without spending half day travelling so any used lightbulbs will have to go in with the rest of the household waste. Maybe time to re-introduce the old style lightbulbs!

- Mary, London, 06/3/2011 10:34

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Ironic - in the name of saving the world from climate change to help the nice polar bears we are now forced to buy only light bulbs that need a haz mat team in full on suits to dispose of them.... genius which enviro numbnuts come up with this?

- goodnessgraciousme, London, 06/3/2011 10:33

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Is there any EU Legislation that doesn't "Shaft" us for our Hard Earned PITTANCES ???!!!

- Fraz, Gosport,Hants., 06/3/2011 10:32

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So the EU (which we don't want) get rid of the lightbulbs we all want and replace them with bulbs that are not only useless, but poisonous as well!!! Brilliant! Richard Littlejohn will never be out of a job! You couldn't make it up! When are all the political parties going to wake up to the fact that we in Britain do not want to be a part of the EU. We don't want to contribute any of our hard-earned taxes to the EU. We do not want the EU, period!

- Suzy J, Lichfield Staffs, 06/3/2011 10:32

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