

# FACT SHEET: Mercury in Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs)

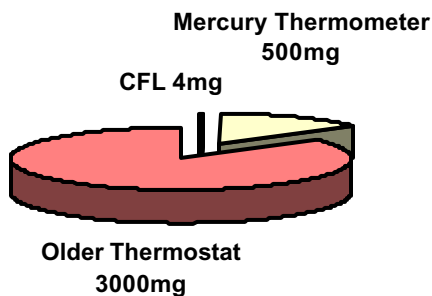
The US Environmental Protection Agency has prepared this fact sheet to respond to questions/concerns about mercury in energy-efficient lighting that uses compact fluorescent technology.

## What are the Health Risks of Mercury and How do CFLs Fit In?

Mercury is an essential ingredient for most energy-efficient lamps. The amount of mercury in a CFL's glass tubing is small, about 4mg. However, every product containing mercury should be handled with care. Exposure to mercury, a toxic metal, can affect our brain, spinal cord, kidneys and liver, causing symptoms such as trembling hands, memory loss, and difficulty moving.

As energy-efficient lighting becomes more popular, it is important that we dispose of the products safely and responsibly. Mercury is released into our environment when products with mercury are broken, disposed of improperly, or incinerated. If you break a CFL, clean it up safely. And always dispose of it properly to keep CFLs working for the environment.

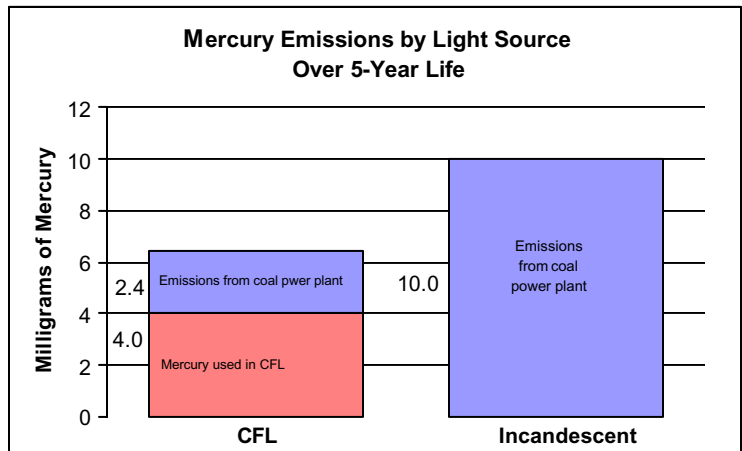
## Household Mercury Amounts



Mercury is an ingredient in several household products. Recycling programs exist for mercury in older non-digital thermostats and mercury thermometers, but residential CFL recycling programs are just now appearing.

## CFLs Responsible for Less Mercury than Incandescent Light Bulbs

Ironically, CFLs present an opportunity to *prevent* mercury from entering our air, where it most affects our health. The highest source of mercury in our air comes from burning fossil fuels such as coal, the most common fuel used in the U.S. to produce electricity. A CFL uses 75% less energy than an incandescent light bulb and lasts at least 6 times longer. A power plant will emit 10mg of mercury to produce the electricity to run an incandescent bulb compared to only 2.4mg of mercury to run a CFL for the same time.



Source: US EPA, June 2002

## Always Dispose of Your CFL Properly

While CFLs for your home are not legally considered hazardous waste according to federal solid waste rules, it is still best for the environment to dispose of your CFL properly upon burnout. Only large commercial users of tubular fluorescent lamps are required to recycle. If recycling is not an option in your area (see below on how to find out), place the CFL in a sealed plastic bag and dispose the same way you would batteries, oil-based paint and motor oil at your local Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) Collection Site. If your local HHW Collection Site cannot accept CFLs (check Earth911.org to find out), seal the CFL in a plastic bag and place with your regular trash.

**Safe cleanup precautions:** If a CFL breaks in your home, open nearby windows to disperse any vapor that may escape, carefully sweep up the fragments (do *not* use your hands) and wipe the area with a disposable paper towel to remove all glass fragments. Do *not* use a vacuum. Place all fragments in a sealed plastic bag and follow disposal instructions above.

## Resources for Recycling or Proper Disposal of CFLs

**NOTE:** Residential recycling programs are not yet available in most regions.

- 1. Earth911.org** (or call **1-800-CLEAN-UP** for an automated hotline): Online, enter your zip code, press "GO," click "Household Hazardous Waste," then "fluorescent light bulb disposal." The site will identify your nearest residential mercury recycling facility or mail disposal method. If you find no specific information on CFL disposal, go back and click on the link for "Mercury Containing Items."
- 2. Call your local government** if the Web site and Hotline number above does not have your local information. Look on the Internet or in the phone book for your local or municipal government entity responsible for waste collection or household hazardous waste.