



Fluorescent Lights

How to handle Fluorescent Lamps and CFLs



Fluorescent lights are energy efficient and help reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change. These lights are able to accomplish this because they contain small amounts of mercury.

Mercury is a natural element that has many uses. However, mercury is a powerful neurotoxin and causes a variety of adverse health effects due to exposure. Those who are at most risk from mercury exposure are pregnant women and developing children.

The leading consensus from environmental organizations and government is that although fluorescents should be handled with care and managed properly to avoid breakage, they are still recommended for business and residential use due to their many benefits.

That being said, people should handle these products with care and common sense - much like you would when driving to avoid crashing your car. By taking simple steps to prevent breaking fluorescent lights, consumers can avoid exposure to mercury. Due to the possibility of mercury vapor being retained in carpets, you may want to consider using and handling fluorescent lights only in areas above hard flooring as well as areas with lamps that are not easily knocked over by children or animals.

The following guidelines are based on recommendations from the U.S. EPA and the recent study conducted by the state of Maine for cleaning up after a CFL or fluorescent tube breaks. Please note that in California, these lights are not allowed in the trash and must be managed as Universal Wastes. It should also be mentioned that if you break a CFL that no longer works or has been used for a while, as opposed to a new CFL, the amount of mercury vapor released during a break is likely to be significantly less. This is because much of the mercury will be bound to the glass rather than released as vapor.

When a fluorescent light breaks please refer to the following guidelines:

Open all doors and windows to ventilate the area for at least 15 minutes.

Turn off your AC/Fan/Heater so as not to circulate any mercury vapor

Young children and pregnant women should leave the area during cleanup.

Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, such as a dust mask and gloves to keep bulb dust and glass from being inhaled or contacting your skin.

Carefully remove the larger pieces and place them in a secure closed container.

Next, begin collecting the smaller pieces and dust. It is recommended that you use two stiff pieces of paper such as index cards or one of the many commercial mercury spill kits available.

Put all material into a sealed container. Pat the area with the sticky side of duct, packing or masking tape. Wipe the area with a damp cloth.

Put all waste and materials used to clean up the bulb in a secure closed container and label it "Universal Waste - broken lamp".

Take the container for recycling to the household hazardous waste facility (HHW) nearest you.

If the bulb breaks on carpet, the [State of Maine's report](#) suggests removing the area of carpet that has been contaminated as a precaution. If this is not feasible, it is recommended that you ventilate the area for several hours as well as during the process of vacuuming because vacuuming can circulate the vapor. If you vacuum, make sure to dispose of the bag along with the broken CFL at your local HHW. You should also ventilate the room during the next few times you vacuum the area.

Consider other Household Hazardous or Universal Wastes that you may have in your home such as pesticides, paint, oil, batteries, non-empty aerosol cans, and electronic devices that you can take to the HHW at the same time as the broken CFL.

To find your nearest HHW facility, go to

1. <http://earth911.org/>
2. <http://ccelearn.csus.edu/mercurylamp/content/resources5.htm>

To read the entire study that the state of Maine did on handling broken CFLs visit <http://maine.gov/dep/rwm/homeowner/cflreport.htm>

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