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Broken Compact Fluorescent Lights Release Mercury Into the Air: Over 100 Times the EPA Limit

Thursday, August 28, 2008 by: David Gutierrez, staff writer
Key concepts: [Mercury](#), [Compact fluorescent lights](#) and [EPA](#)

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(NaturalNews) Compact fluorescent light bulbs can release dangerous amounts of mercury into the air when they break and must be disposed of very carefully, according to a report by the state of Maine.

Compact fluorescent bulbs, which consume only about a quarter as much energy as traditional incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer, all use mercury to produce light. They do not give off mercury when used properly, but the element can escape into the air if a bulb is broken. Mercury is a neurotoxin that can lead to brain and nervous disorders, particularly in children and developing fetuses.

In one study, researchers from the state of Maine shattered 65 compact fluorescent light bulbs and measured [mercury levels](#) in the air both before and after various cleanup methods.

"We found some very high levels [of mercury] even after we tried a number of cleanup techniques," said Mark Hyland, director of Maine's Bureau of Remediation and Waste Management. In some cases, [mercury](#) levels exceeded the federal government's chronic exposure maximums by up to 100 times.

There is no federal level set for acute mercury exposure, so many states have set their own guidelines either at or above the federal chronic levels. The levels of mercury measured by Maine researchers, however, exceeded even these higher standards.

Based on its research, the state of Maine recommends that if a compact fluorescent bulb breaks, the room should be well-ventilated, and children and pets should be removed. A vacuum cleaner should never be used to clean up the broken glass, even in a carpeted room. Instead, shards should be picked up with stiff paper or tape, then the area should be wiped down with a damp towel. All bulb fragments should be sealed in a screw-top jar and then removed from the house.

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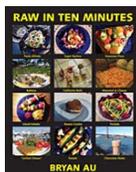
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