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## Give Up Familiar Light Bulb? Not Without Fight, Some Say

By **EDWARD WYATT**

WASHINGTON — American protests against the encroachment of government have been spurred by many causes — tea, of course, and guns, frequently. The latest catalyst: light bulbs.

A 2007 bill, passed overwhelmingly by both houses of Congress and signed into law by [George W. Bush](#), will make the familiar incandescent bulb subject to strict efficiency standards next year.

The effect will be to make current 100-watt bulbs obsolete — and that has sent conservative lawmakers, libertarians, some environmental activists and owners of Easy-Bake Ovens into a frenzy of activity to get the law repealed or, at least, to stockpile the bulbs before they disappear from store shelves.

“I do care about my carbon footprint, not to mention my light bill,” said Dana Carpender, a cookbook author in Bloomington, Ind. “But unless something dramatic happens to bring down the cost of alternatives, I will be stashing away a pile of incandescents.”

The law does not outlaw incandescent bulbs or dictate that consumers must use the spiral-shaped [compact fluorescent lights](#) that have become increasingly popular in recent years. Rather, it sets standards for the amount of light emitted per watt of power used. Current 100-watt bulbs must become 25 percent more efficient, and [makers are designing new bulbs](#).

To Representative [Joe Barton](#), the Texas Republican who has sponsored a bill to reverse the new guidelines, that nevertheless means Congress is dictating what types of light Americans can use in their homes.

“From the health insurance you’re allowed to have, to the car you can drive, to the light bulbs you can buy, Washington is making too many decisions that are better left to you and your family,” Mr. Barton said when he introduced his bill in January.

Opponents of the regulations say the fluorescent bulbs are too expensive, flicker annoyingly and are health hazards because they contain mercury.

While they are not unanimous on the issue, some environmental activists counter that by saying the mercury in a single fluorescent bulb is less than what some power plants throw into the atmosphere while generating the electricity it takes to light one incandescent bulb.

Makers of appliances and light bulbs, meanwhile, support the federal standards because they do not want to have to make scores of products to meet individual state regulations.

But to many Americans, the 100-watt bulb has become a cause célèbre.

Tea Party campaigners have adopted it; Representative [Michele Bachmann](#) of Minnesota, who introduced a bill to repeal the light bulb law in 2008 and again this year, talked about the issue in her response to the president's State of the Union message in January. And this week, Senator [Rand Paul](#) of Kentucky said not only did he resent the light bulb standards but he also blamed the government for poorly working toilets in his house because of the regulations on how much water they should use.

The light bulb regulations already have affected the American economy. Last fall, [General Electric](#) closed its last major United States plant producing the old-style incandescent bulbs, in Winchester, Va.

Nearly all compact fluorescent bulbs are made in Asia, although some United States manufacturers are retooling former factories to make other energy-efficient bulbs.

Several companies in the United States are working on light-emitting diode, or LED, bulbs, and on energy-efficient halogen incandescent bulbs, which use a halogen element enclosed in a traditional glass bulb.

The Energy Department says the energy savings are significant. Kathleen Hogan, deputy assistant secretary for energy efficiency at the department, told a Senate committee this week that by meeting the new lighting standards, consumers could save nearly \$6 billion in 2015.

A household that upgrades 15 current incandescent bulbs could save about \$50 a year, Ms. Hogan said, even after accounting for the higher cost of the fluorescent bulbs, which average above \$1 each, versus about 35 cents for incandescent.

Halogen incandescent bulbs now cost about \$1.50 each, and LED bulbs, which have only begun to be introduced, can cost \$20 or more each, though they can last 10 years or more.

Three-way bulbs, appliance bulbs and a few other specialty products are excluded from the new standards.

All of which serves to convince some people that the government should not dictate light bulb standards.

Amy Ridenour, president of the National Center for Public Policy Research, a conservative group, said she already had about 100 old-style incandescent light bulbs stored in her basement in Laurel, Md., and she hoped to have several hundred by the time the new standards go into effect on Jan. 1.

Ms. Ridenour said that she opposed the government interference, but that her hoarding was primarily driven by concerns about the mercury in the compact fluorescent bulbs. Her middle child, a 10-year-old son, is autistic, Ms. Ridenour said. "He's knocked over quite a few lamps," she said, and broken plenty of light bulbs in the process.

The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) issues detailed instructions on how to [clean up a broken fluorescent](#) bulb because of the potential for spilling mercury. Each bulb contains about four milligrams of mercury, compared with 500 milligrams in old-style glass thermometers.

Nevertheless, the E.P.A. recommends recycling used fluorescent bulbs rather than disposing of them in household garbage.

Unknown, so far, is the economic impact of the retooling of the Easy-Bake Oven, the source of an unimaginable number of forced smiles summoned by parents after tasting a child's cookies and cakes. The oven, a member of the National Toy Hall of Fame, uses a 100-watt bulb as its heat source, so [Hasbro](#) must give it a makeover. This fall, it will introduce the new Easy-Bake Ultimate Oven, which will use a different, so far undisclosed, heating element.