



Mundelein Fire Department

Important Information on Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs



A **compact fluorescent lamp (CFL)**, also known as a **compact fluorescent light bulb** (or less commonly as a **compact fluorescent tube [CFT]**) is a type of fluorescent lamp. Many CFLs are designed to replace an incandescent lamp and can fit in the existing light fixtures formerly used for incandescents.

Compared to incandescent lamps, CFLs use 75% less energy and last up to 10 times longer. If every home in America replaced just one incandescent light bulb with a CFL, in one year it would save enough energy to light 3 million homes and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those of more than 800,000 cars.

CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing – an average of 5-milligrams – about the amount that would cover the tip of a ballpoint pen. By comparison, older thermometers contain about 500 milligrams of mercury. It would take 100 CFLs to equal that amount. New technology is providing CFL bulbs now with even less mercury.

What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Bulb Breaks (CFLs and regular tubes)

The USEPA recommends the following clean-up and disposal guidelines:

1. **Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.**
2. **Carefully scoop up the fragments and powder with stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a sealed plastic bag.**
 - Use disposable rubber gloves, if available (i.e., do not use bare hands). Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes and place them in the plastic bag.
 - Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.
3. **Place all cleanup materials in a second sealed plastic bag.**
 - Place the first bag in a second sealed plastic bag and put it in the outdoor trash container or in another outdoor protected area for the next normal trash disposal. Note: Some states prohibit such trash disposal and require that broken and unbroken lamps be taken to a local recycling center.
 - Wash your hands after disposing of the bag.
4. **If a fluorescent bulb breaks on a rug or carpet:**
 - First, remove all materials you can without using a vacuum cleaner, following the steps above. Sticky tape (such as duct tape) can be used to pick up small pieces and powder.
 - If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken, remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister) and put the bag or vacuum debris in two sealed plastic bags in the outdoor trash or protected outdoor location for normal disposal.

How to Dispose of Fluorescent Bulbs

Although commercially generated fluorescent lamps are required by law to be handled separately from solid waste, residents are allowed to dispose of them with the rest of their household garbage. SWALCO does, however, accept fluorescent bulbs from residents at their Household Chemical Waste (HCW) collection events if you do not want to throw them away. Please see the schedule of HCW collection events.