



RUSSIAN RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

300 Seminary Ave, Ukiah, CA 95482 • (707) 833-2553 • www.rrwatershed.org

RRWA Environmental Column – February 2011

Keep Your Fluorescent Bulbs and CFLs Out of the Trash: Recycle Them!

Fluorescent bulbs and Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs) have become increasingly popular.

Replacing incandescent bulbs with CFLs is a practical way to reduce energy consumption and the generation of greenhouse gasses that contribute to global climate change. CFLs use one third the energy of standard incandescent light bulbs, and last up to ten times longer. Replacing a 60-watt incandescent with a 13-watt CFL can save you at least \$30 in energy costs over the life of the bulb. Fluorescent bulbs come in many shapes and sizes and are compatible with most light fixtures that can use incandescent bulbs.

While using fluorescent bulbs and CFLs is an excellent way to help the environment and save money, fluorescent bulbs and CFLs need special disposal because they contain small amounts of the element mercury. Mercury is an essential, irreplaceable component in these bulbs and is what allows the bulb to be an efficient light source. Mercury is, however, a hazardous material, and these bulbs must be disposed of at designated recycling locations (more later) and not in the trash. As long as the mercury remains inside the bulb, it poses no threat.

If you do break a fluorescent bulb or CFL, follow these simple clean-up steps:

- Open a window to introduce fresh air into the room (the mercury quickly becomes a gas once a bulb is broken);
- Leave the area for 15 minutes or more and keep children and pets away;
- Turn off central heat/air conditioning;
- Collect the bulb pieces using a stiff piece of paper, such as an index card- don't use a vacuum.
- Use a damp cloth or paper towel to pick up the finest particles;
- Pat the area with the sticky side of packing tape to remove tiny glass shards;
- Put all material into a sealed plastic bag or sealed container;
- Take the sealed bag or container to a place that accepts fluorescent bulbs and CFLs for proper recycling.

In 2006, the State of California made it unlawful to dispose of any bulb that contains mercury in the trash. Improper disposal of these bulbs allows their toxic ingredients to end up in the landfill where it can leach into the soil and water, poisoning fish and other wildlife as it makes its way through the food chain.

Still, the benefits of CFLs and fluorescent bulbs far outweigh the negatives, so don't stop switching to CFLs and fluorescent bulbs. Do be aware that that these bulbs need special handling – they do not belong in your trash can! When CFLs and fluorescent bulbs have burned out, they must be recycled, either through your local hazardous waste collection agency or at one of the many stores that now offers recycling.

In Sonoma County used or broken fluorescent bulbs and CFLs can be brought to the Household Toxics Facility or disposed of through one of the County's Community Toxics Collection Events. For information on disposing of toxics in Sonoma County go to www.recyclenow.org or call the EcoDesk at (707) 565-3375.

In Mendocino County and Lake Counties, used or broken fluorescent bulbs and CFLs can be brought to HazMobile Collection events. For information on when the HazMobile will visit your area, visit www.MendoRecycle.org or call the Recycling Hotline at 707-468-9704.

You can also check out www.earth911.org to find recycling centers in your area. Large stores such as Ikea, Home Depot, and Wal-Mart have also initiated bulb disposal programs and collection events. Ikea has set up kiosks in their stores where customers can dispose of used bulbs, regardless of where they were purchased.



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Many local businesses also take back spent fluorescent bulbs and CFLs from their customers. Your local hazardous waste agency will have information about these businesses. If your local hardware store does not provide a take-back program, request that they start one.

Please do your part and keep fluorescent bulbs and CFLs out of the trash!

This article was authored by Lisa Steinman of the Sonoma County Waste Management Agency (SCWMA) on behalf of the Russian River Watershed Association. RRWA (www.rrwatershed.org) is an association of local public agencies in the Russian River Watershed that have come together to coordinate regional programs for clean water, fisheries restoration, and watershed enhancement.