



Fluorescent Bulb Recycling

Using energy-efficient fluorescent light bulbs makes sense: you save money on electrical bills, and they are better for the environment. Because these bulbs contain mercury, all fluorescent bulbs from households must be recycled to avoid polluting the environment and posing a health threat. It is illegal to throw these bulbs out.

What bulbs can I recycle?

- Compact fluorescent bulbs (all sizes)
- Fluorescent Bulbs of all shapes and sizes (tubes, circles, U-shaped, bug “zappers”, tanning lights, and black lights)
- High intensity discharge (HID) lamps, typically used for exterior lighting (metal halide, mercury vapor, and high pressure sodium)
- Neon lights

Where can I recycle my fluorescent bulbs?

- **Hardware stores and retailers:** Many retailers that sell fluorescent bulbs also collect them to recycle. Contact your local retailer to find out whether they accept fluorescent bulbs to recycle (there is sometimes a fee of \$1 or \$2). Also check your electric utility’s website. Many power companies have arrangements with retailers to accept used residential bulbs. Some utilities offer coupons to customers to cover the recycling fees.
- **County household hazardous waste programs:** Many county household hazardous waste (HHW) programs accept used fluorescent bulbs for recycling.
- For a list of retailers that accept fluorescent and HID bulbs, go to www.earth911.org or call 800-253-2387. In the Twin Cities metro area go to rethinkrecycling.com and outside the metro go to recyclemoreminnesota.org to contact your local recycling coordinator.

Fluorescent bulbs save money and protect our environment:

- Fluorescent bulbs use only one-fourth of the energy of incandescent bulbs and last as much as 10 times longer. Replacing a 100-watt incandescent bulb with the equivalent fluorescent bulb will save you as much as \$50 over the life of the bulb.
- In 2009, Minnesotans recycled 680 tons of residential fluorescent and HID lamps.

Handle with Care:

Be careful when handling and transporting fluorescent bulbs to avoid breakage and exposure to mercury.

- **Storing:** To avoid breaking bulbs, store them in their original packaging somewhere inaccessible to children.
- **Transporting:** When transporting fluorescent bulbs to the recycling facilities, repack them in their original packaging or wrap them in newspaper or bubble wrap and place in a box or bag to prevent breakage. Carry these items in the trunk of your car, if possible. Make sure there are no heavy items in the trunk that can shift and break the bulbs. As an added precaution, put each bulb in a sealed plastic bag.
- It is safe to throw out regular incandescent light bulbs and halogen bulbs since they do not contain mercury.

Frequently Asked Questions:

- **Fluorescent bulbs have mercury in them; why should I use them?**
Fluorescent bulbs are safe to use. No mercury is released when they are in use. Simply be careful when removing or replacing a fluorescent bulb. By saving energy, fluorescent bulbs prevent more mercury being released into the air by power plants. A typical power plant emits 10mg of mercury to produce the electricity needed to run an incandescent light bulb, compares to only 2.4 mg of mercury needed to run a compact fluorescent bulb.
- **What should I do if I break a fluorescent bulb?**
Because of the mercury in fluorescent bulbs, breaking a fluorescent bulb is not like breaking an incandescent bulb. If you break a fluorescent bulb, keep all people and pets out of the room. Open the windows and ventilate the room for fifteen minutes before cleaning up. Put on rubber gloves and carefully pick up any broken pieces, glass shards, or powder with sticky tape. After all visible pieces have been picked up vacuum the area. Place all the pieces and used clean up material, including the vacuum bag, in a plastic bag and seal it. Call your local HHW facility for disposal instructions. Be sure to wash your hands after clean up. If you break two or more fluorescent bulbs, or if you are unsure what to do, call the Minnesota Duty Officer any time.
- **How is mercury harmful?**
Mercury can damage human health because it is toxic to the nervous system - the brain and spinal cord - particularly the developing nervous system of a fetus or young child.