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## Frequently Asked Questions About Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs)

*As the push to fight global warming intensifies, CFLs are receiving an increasing amount of attention – both positive and negative. What are the benefits of using CFLs?*

ENERGY STAR<sup>®</sup> qualified CFLs use up to 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs, which can reduce utility bills. By replacing the five most used bulbs in your home to ENERGY STAR qualified CFLs, you can save about \$35 a year in energy costs. In addition, CFLs last up to ten times longer, which makes frequent changing of burnt out light bulbs a thing of the past.



Size comparison of mercury found in a typical compact fluorescent light bulb sold in the U.S.  
Photo courtesy of Monte Helm, Ph.D. Fort Lewis College

*Historically, some consumers refused to switch to CFLs despite these benefits because they didn't like the light quality or performance of the bulbs. Has CFL technology evolved?*

The CFLs of today have improved over the models from even just a couple of years ago. CFL technology has advanced dramatically to produce light that is warm and inviting without the delay, flicker, hum or buzz common with early fluorescent lights. In addition, CFLs now come in a variety of shapes and sizes so they fit in most household lights. There are even dimmable CFLs.

*There has been a lot of talk about the mercury in CFLs? Are CFLs safe to use?*

CFLs contain a small amount of mercury encased in the base of the bulb, but in reality, CFLs pose no harm to consumers because they do not emit mercury when they are intact, in use, properly stored or handled. What many people don't realize is that the largest source of mercury in our air actually comes from burning coal to produce electricity, and unfortunately, the standard incandescent bulb uses much more electricity than a CFL, which means using incandescent bulbs actually causes more mercury pollution than a CFL, even when you take into account the mercury in the bulb. With proper recycling you can reduce that even more.

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***Is anything being done to reduce the amount of mercury in CFLs?***

Yes, in March, 2008 the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced new requirements for CFLs bearing the ENERGY STAR label. As of December, 2008, they were required to contain less than 5 milligrams of mercury per bulb. With that being said, it should be emphasized how minimal 5 milligrams is. Some watch batteries contain 25 milligrams of mercury and many manual thermostats contain up to 3,000 milligrams.

***What if a CFL breaks?***

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), you can safely clean up a spill from a broken CFL. The small amount of mercury in a CFL is not likely to cause a health problem, but it should still be cleaned up properly. Instructions for cleaning up a broken CFL are available on the EPA's ENERGY STAR Web site, [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov).

***Is it true CFLs should not be thrown in the trash?***

Because CFLs contain a small amount of mercury, they should be recycled. Focus on Energy has partnered with more than 250 retailers throughout the state to make CFL recycling easy and convenient. For a list of participating retailers, visit [focusonenergy.com/changealight](http://focusonenergy.com/changealight). CFLs can also be taken to local recycling centers.

For more information about ENERGY STAR qualified CFLs or how to clean up after a broken CFL, call Focus on Energy at (800) 762-7077 or visit [focusonenergy.com/changealight](http://focusonenergy.com/changealight).