

# Fluorescent light bulbs: Use them, recycle them.



Using energy-efficient fluorescent light bulbs makes good sense—you save money on electric bills *and* help protect the environment. But because they contain mercury, fluorescent bulbs of all shapes and sizes (compact fluorescents, fluorescent tubes, and high-intensity discharge bulbs used for exterior lighting) from households must be recycled to avoid polluting the environment and posing a health threat. Never throw these bulbs in the trash—it's illegal to do so.



## Where can I recycle my fluorescent bulbs?

### Hardware stores and retailers

Many retailers that sell fluorescent light bulbs also collect them for recycling. Contact your local retailer to find out whether they accept fluorescent bulbs for recycling (fees vary from free to \$1 or \$2). For a list of retailers that accept used fluorescent and HID lamps, go to [earth911.org](http://earth911.org) or call 800-253-2687. In the Twin Cities metro area (except Scott county), consult [www.GreenGuardian.com](http://www.GreenGuardian.com).

Check your electric utility's website—power companies often have arrangements with retailers, such as hardware stores, to accept used residential fluorescent bulbs. Some utilities offer customers coupons that will cover the cost of recycling.

### County household hazardous waste programs

Many county household hazardous waste (HHW) programs accept used household fluorescent bulbs for recycling. For information about your county's HHW program, visit [www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw/](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw/) or call the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's HHW program at 651-296-6300 or 800-657-3864 (outside the Twin Cities metro area only).

## Fluorescent bulbs save money and protect our environment

- ▶ Fluorescent light bulbs use only one-fourth as much energy as equivalent incandescent bulbs. And they last up to 10 times longer.  
*Replacing a 100-watt incandescent bulb with an equivalent compact fluorescent bulb can save you as much as \$50 over the life of the bulb.*
- ▶ Fluorescent bulbs use less energy, reducing emissions at power plants that burn fossil fuels, resulting in a net reduction in mercury pollution.  
*Replacing a 150-watt bulb with a 28-watt compact fluorescent bulb results in 1,020 pounds less carbon dioxide released from power plants over the lifetime of the fluorescent bulb.*
- ▶ Fewer power plants are needed. Less energy demand means electric utilities need less new generating capacity. Utilities can avoid building new plants, which results in more savings for customers and less future pollution of our environment.



**Bulb recycling quick links** ▶ [earth911.org](http://earth911.org)  
[GreenGuardian.com](http://GreenGuardian.com)

## 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 for recycling, repack them in their original packaging or wrap in newspaper or bubble wrap and place in a box or bag to prevent breakage. Carry them in the trunk of the car, if possible. Make sure there are no heavy items in the trunk that can shift or roll around and break the bulbs. As an added precaution, place used bulbs in sealed heavy-duty plastic bags.

## Frequently asked questions

### Fluorescent bulbs have mercury in them—so why should I use them?

Fluorescent light bulbs are safe to use—no mercury is released when the bulbs are in use. Simply be careful when removing or replacing a fluorescent bulb.

By saving energy, fluorescent bulbs actually prevent more mercury from being released into the air by power plants. A power plant emits about 10 mg of mercury to produce the electricity needed to run an incandescent bulb, compared to only 2.4 mg of mercury to run a compact fluorescent bulb for the same amount of time.

### What should I do if I break a fluorescent bulb?

Because of the mercury in fluorescent light bulbs, breaking a fluorescent bulb is *not* like breaking a regular light bulb.

**If you break a fluorescent bulb,** keep people and pets out of the room. Open the windows and exterior doors to vent the mercury vapor to the outside for about 15 minutes before you clean up. Put on rubber gloves and carefully pick up the fragments, glass shards, and any powder with sticky tape. Once you've picked up any visible pieces, you can vacuum. Place all the pieces and used clean-up materials (including vacuum bag) in a plastic bag, seal it. Call your local HHW facility for disposal instructions. Be sure to wash your hands after clean up.

If you break more than two fluorescent bulbs or if you are unsure what to do, call the Minnesota Duty Officer at 800-422-0798 any time, day or night.



### Not fluorescent, but still contains mercury

HID bulbs also need to be recycled. These bulbs are sometimes used by homeowners for outdoor lighting.

**For more information on household hazardous wastes**—including safe disposal of paints, solvents, yard chemicals, and more—and collection programs, contact your county's solid waste office through [www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw](http://www.pca.state.mn.us/hhw), to find a local program, or call **651-296-6300** or **800-657-3864** (*out of metro area only*).

For information on most Twin Cities metro counties, visit [GreenGuardian.com](http://GreenGuardian.com).



**Minnesota Pollution  
Control Agency**