



MAFES Dawg Tracks

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*Safe Handling of Compact
Fluorescent Lamps or Bulbs
(CFLs)*



The relatively new compact fluorescent bulbs and lamps are, for the most part, in full use now. The incandescent bulbs that we have been accustomed to for years are virtually on the way out, except in special situations.

CFLs are more expensive to purchase, but due to the average rated life (8 to 15 times more than incandescent), the energy savings will more than justify the front end cost. Incandescent lamps are manufactured to have a life span of between 750 and 1000 hours. The CFLs are manufactured with a bit of powdered mercury, which makes proper disposal a different proposition to consider.

If one drops a CFL the glass shatters very easily and it allows the mercury to readily escape. Precaution must be used in the cleanup. In 2007, the U.S. Environmental Protection Authority (USEPA) claims that there were over 270 million compact lamps sold. They also stated that, if all these lamps were sent to the landfills, it would represent about .1% of mercury emissions nationwide.

Following are some steps to take when CFLs break:

BEFORE CLEANUP-

- ✓ Have all personnel in the immediate area to vacate it.
- ✓ Open windows and doors to allow the area to “air” out for 5 to 10 minutes.
- ✓ Shut off the central forced air heating/air conditioning system or other heating/cooling system, if you have either one.
- ✓ Collect the materials needed to clean up the broken bulb:
 - Stiff paper or cardboard
 - Sticky tape
 - Damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes (for hard surfaces) and:
 - A glass jar with a metal lid of a sealable plastic bag.

DURING CLEANUP-

- ✓ **Do Not Vacuum** – Vacuuming is not recommended unless broken glass remains after all other cleanup steps have been taken. Vacuuming could spread mercury-containing powder or mercury vapor.
- ✓ Be thorough in collecting broken glass and visible powder. Scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard. Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder. Place the used tape in the glass jar or plastic bag. See the detailed cleanup instructions for more information, and for differences in cleaning up hard surfaces versus carpeting or rugs.
- ✓ Place cleanup materials in a sealable container.

AFTER CLEAN UP-

- Promptly place all bulb debris and cleanup materials, including vacuum cleaner bags, outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of. Avoid leaving any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors.
- Next, check with your local government about disposal requirements in your area, because some localities require fluorescent bulbs (broken or unbroken) be taken to a recycling center. If there is no such requirement in your area, you can dispose of the materials with regular household trash.
- If practical, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the heating /air conditioning system shut off for several hours.

The question may arise, “What if I can’t follow the recommended steps in cleanup?” Don’t get too upset, the above recommendations are proven steps that EPA recommends. Follow them as closely as possible. **But remember: CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury- less than 1/100th of the amount found in a mercury thermometer.**

