# Recycling at Home

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) contain a small amount of mercury, about 3-4 milligrams each, sealed within the glass tubing. As with many household items such as paints, cleaners, and pesticides, CFLs should be handled properly and disposed of according to state requirements. EPA encourages consumers to recycle their spent CFLs to protect human health and avoid unsafe releases to the environment.

Increasingly, communities, neighborhoods, and even some retailers are offering CFL collection opportunities. For more details, including local recycling locations and contact information for recycling in your area, visit **www.earth911.com** or **www.epa.gov/bulbrecycling** and click on "Where You Live."

# State Requirements

Requirements for CFL recycling vary by state. Some states require recycling mercury-containing light bulbs after they burn out. For more information about state-specific requirements, please contact your state or local environmental regulatory agency.

## Actions You Can Take to Prevent Broken Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs

Fluorescent bulbs are made of glass and can break if dropped or roughly handled. To avoid breaking a bulb, follow these general practices:

- Always switch off and allow a working CFL bulb to cool before handling.
- Always handle CFL bulbs carefully to avoid breakage.
  - If possible, screw/unscrew the CFL by holding the plastic or ceramic base, not the glass tubing.
  - Gently screw in the CFL until snug. Do not over-tighten.
  - Never forcefully twist the glass tubing.
- Do not install CFLs in table lamps and floor lamps that can be easily knocked over, in unprotected light fixtures, or in lamps that are incompatible with the spiral or folded shape of many CFLs.
- Do not use CFL bulbs in locations where they can easily be broken, such as play spaces.
- Use CFL bulbs that have a glass or plastic cover over the spiral or folded glass tube, if available. These types of bulbs look more like incandescent bulbs and may be more durable if dropped.
- Consider using a drop cloth (e.g., plastic sheet or beach towel) when changing a fluorescent light bulb in case a breakage should occur. The drop cloth will help prevent mercury contamination of nearby surfaces and can be bundled with the bulb debris for disposal.

# Don't be left in the dark.

## Safely clean up and recycle CFLs.

EPA
United States Environmental Protection Agency
EPA530-f-11-001

# Quick Guide to Cleaning Up a Broken CFL

The most important steps to reduce exposure to mercury vapor from a broken bulb are:

## Before cleanup

- Have people and pets leave the room.
- Air out the room for 5-10 minutes by opening a window or door to the outdoor environment.
- Shut off the central forced air heating/air conditioning (H&AC) system, if you have one.
- Collect materials (stiff paper/cardboard, sticky tape, damp paper towels/wet wipes) needed to clean up broken bulb.

## During cleanup

- Be thorough in collecting broken glass and visible powder.
- Place cleanup materials in a sealable container (plastic bag or glass jar).

## After cleanup

- Promptly place all bulb debris and cleanup materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of properly. Avoid leaving any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors.
- Not all recycling centers may accept broken CFLs and some states may have prohibitions on disposal of debris. Check with your local and/or state household hazardous waste authority for disposal requirements in your area.
- For several hours, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the H&AC system shut off.

For more detailed guidance on cleaning up and safely disposing of a broken CFL, please visit: **www.epa.gov/cflcleanup**.