

San Dimas Community News - May 2008

Everything You Wanted to Know About Fluorescent Light Bulbs, But Didn't Know To Ask

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Ask your friend or neighbor if they are using compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) to save energy and reduce global warming - chances are they will say "yes." Now ask them if they are aware that it is illegal to dump the burned out bulbs in the trash - chances are they will say "no."

The good news is that fluorescent bulbs last up to ten times as long as incandescent bulbs, use up to 75% less energy and save up to \$65 in energy costs. (For more information, visit www.sce.com/RebatesandSavings.) The bad news is that both the big tubes and the curly bulbs are energy efficient because they contain small amounts of mercury which is toxic and considered hazardous waste.

It is estimated that only five to ten percent of fluorescent bulbs are being properly recycled. Therefore, the California Environmental Protection Agency and local governments are working to find economic and trouble-free ways to recycle CFL's.

Unlike bottle and can recycling, there is presently no statewide plan for handling burned out fluorescents. While they should be recycled, do NOT place them in your curbside recycling cart because they might break thereby allowing the mercury to escape.

Since Mercury is toxic, if you break a CFL or anything with mercury in it, you need to clean it carefully. It is recommended to open all doors and windows to ventilate the area for at least fifteen minutes. Then, sweep up – do not vacuum – all the glass fragments and fine particles. To thoroughly clean up the area, wipe it with a damp paper towel and place everything in a plastic bag. Seal the bag and take it to a hazardous waste facility.

The nearest places to recycle mercury or compact fluorescent light bulbs in San Dimas are Sam's Club and Wal-Mart. (Please note they only accept them when holding special events.) In addition, residents can always bring their bulbs, along with other hazardous and e-waste, to Los Angeles County's Household Hazardous Waste Round-Up Events. For more information on these events, visit 888CleanLA.com, call 888-CleanLA or call the City of San Dimas Public Works Department at 909-394.6240. If you are looking for locations outside the San Dimas area, visit Earth911.com.