

An Act to Provide for the Safe Collection and Recycling of Mercury-Containing Light Bulbs

Protect people, save money, promote fairness

Fluorescent lights are excellent products that are gaining in popularity. It's essential that they are safe to use and dispose of.

- Fluorescents provide excellent light while using much less energy than old incandescent bulbs. They save energy, money, and help reduce global warming from power plants.
- CFLs (compact fluorescents) are gaining market share and this trend will accelerate as old-fashioned, inefficient incandescent light bulbs are largely slated to be phased out by 2014.
- LFLs (tube lights) have already saturated the marketplace and are the dominant lighting choice for commercial buildings.

Fluorescent bulbs contain mercury, a potent toxic chemical, which is dangerous to both children and adults.

- Mercury attacks the developing brains of infants and children, causing brain damage and developmental problems. It has also been linked to health problems in adults.ⁱ
- Just 1/70th of a teaspoon of mercury could contaminate a 25-acre lake to the point where fish are unsafe to eat.ⁱⁱ
- There is 30 times more mercury in some CFLs than others,ⁱⁱⁱ while some tube (LFL) lights contain 80 times more than others.^{iv}
- EPA estimates that in 2004 there were about 514 pounds of mercury in Maine homes and businesses from mercury-containing lighting.^v This is more than 20 times more mercury than currently emanates from the defunct Holtra-Chem facility in Orrington, still one of the largest mercury emitters in Maine.



The Maine DEP has determined that broken fluorescent lighting can create mercury hazards in the home, especially for small children^{vi}, yet many people are unaware of the dangers.

- Many Mainers don't know that these light bulbs contain mercury and should not be discarded in the trash. Others don't know where to take their used bulbs for safe disposal and recycling.
- Bulbs containing mercury are routinely disposed of in household trash creating mercury hazards in homes, businesses and the environment.

Maine lawmakers have an opportunity to protect our families and environment, save taxpayers money, and promote fairness, by setting a reasonable standard for how much mercury can be contained in bulbs sold in Maine, and by requiring bulb manufacturers to share in the cost and responsibility for safe collection and recycling. The bill would:

- Set a maximum mercury content standard for all mercury-containing lighting, reducing mercury in lighting across the board, lowering mercury use and potential hazards.
- Create a shared-responsibility collection and recycling system for consumers, and take steps to create a collection program for Maine businesses.
- Improve the state's procurement policy to encourage the manufacture of fluorescent lighting with the lowest possible mercury content while maximizing energy efficiency and lamp life.



A Maine Environmental Priorities Coalition Fact Sheet

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References:

- ⁱ Transade, Leonardo, and Philip J. Landrigan and Clyde Schechter. "Public Health and Economic Consequences of Methyl Mercury Toxicity to the Developing Brain." *Environmental Health Perspectives*. May 2005.
<http://www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov/articlerender.fcgi?artid=1257552>
- ⁱⁱ Barr, Linda. "EPA's Draft Mercury Use Reduction Program." US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). 11/30/2004
- ⁱⁱⁱ Culver, Alicia. "Mercury in Lighting Equipment." Green Purchasing Institute. 9/26/2008.
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Barr, Linda. "EPA's Draft Mercury Use Reduction Program." US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA). 11/30/2004.
- ^{vi} Ladner, Stacy. "Maine Compact Fluorescent Breakage Study Report." Maine DEP. 2/2008.
<http://www.maine.gov/dep/rwm/homeowner/cflreport.htm>