

What to Do if a Fluorescent or Other Mercury-Containing Light Bulb Breaks

Compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) are lighting more homes than ever before, and EPA is encouraging Americans to use and recycle them safely. Carefully recycling CFLs prevents the release of mercury into the environment and allows for the reuse of glass, metals and other materials that make up fluorescent lights.

EPA is continually reviewing its clean-up and disposal recommendations for CFLs to ensure that the Agency presents the most up-to-date information for consumers and businesses. Maine's Department of Environmental Protection released a [CFL breakage study report](#) EXIT Disclaimer on February 25, 2008. EPA has conducted an initial review of this study and, as a result of this review, we have updated the CFL cleanup instructions below.

Pending the completion of a full review of the Maine study, EPA will determine whether additional changes to the cleanup recommendations are warranted. The agency plans to conduct its own study on CFLs after thorough review of the Maine study.

Types of Mercury-Containing Bulbs

- Fluorescent bulbs, which include linear, U-tube and circline fluorescent tubes, bug zappers, tanning bulbs, black lights, germicidal bulbs, high output bulbs, cold-cathode fluorescent bulbs, and compact fluorescent bulbs;
- High intensity discharge bulbs, which include metal halide, ceramic metal halide, high pressure sodium, and mercury vapor;
- Mercury short-arc bulbs; and
- Neon bulbs.

Learn more about...

- [Types of fluorescent bulbs](#)
- [Which light bulbs contain mercury, and how fluorescent and other mercury-containing bulbs work](#) EXIT Disclaimer
- [Recycling and disposal options for mercury-containing bulbs](#)
- [Bulb recycling programs in your area](#)
- [Compact fluorescent bulbs that earn the government's ENERGY STAR](#)

Fluorescent light bulbs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing. EPA recommends the following clean-up and disposal below. Please also read the [information on this page about what never to do with a mercury spill](#).

Before Clean-up: Air Out the Room

- Have people and pets leave the room, and don't let anyone walk through the breakage area on their way out.

- Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.
- Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.

Clean-Up Steps for Hard Surfaces

- Carefully scoop up glass pieces and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with metal lid (such as a canning jar) or in a sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
- Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place towels in the glass jar or plastic bag.
- Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

Clean-up Steps for Carpeting or Rug

- Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with metal lid (such as a canning jar) or in a sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
- If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken.
- Remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister), and put the bag or vacuum debris in a sealed plastic bag.

Clean-up Steps for Clothing, Bedding and Other Soft Materials

- If clothing or bedding materials come in direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from inside the bulb that may stick to the fabric, the clothing or bedding should be thrown away. Do not wash such clothing or bedding because mercury fragments in the clothing may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage.
- You can, however, wash clothing or other materials that have been exposed to the mercury vapor from a broken CFL, such as the clothing you are wearing when you cleaned up the broken CFL, as long as that clothing has not come into direct contact with the materials from the broken bulb.
- If shoes come into direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from the bulb, wipe them off with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place the towels or wipes in a glass jar or plastic bag for disposal.

Disposal of Clean-up Materials

- Immediately place all clean-up materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area for the next normal trash pickup.
- Wash your hands after disposing of the jars or plastic bags containing clean-up materials.

- Check with your local or state government about disposal requirements in your specific area. Some states do not allow such trash disposal. Instead, they require that broken and unbroken mercury-containing bulbs be taken to a local recycling center.

Future Cleaning of Carpeting or Rug: Air Out the Room During and After Vacuuming

- The next several times you vacuum, shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system and open a window before vacuuming.
- Keep the central heating/air conditioning system shut off and the window open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is completed.