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Fluorescent Lighting Facts and Clean-Up Procedures for Broken Bulbs



Fluorescent Lighting Contains Mercury

Fluorescent lighting (this includes bulbs, tubes and compact fluorescent lights) contains a small amount of mercury, sealed within the glass tubing. Mercury is an essential component of fluorescent lighting and is what allows the bulb to be an efficient light source. Unfortunately, when released into the environment, mercury can pose a hazard to human health or harm the environment and it is illegal to dispose of mercury-containing products in landfills.

No mercury is released when the bulbs are intact or in use, so proper handling and disposal will eliminate any mercury risk from fluorescent lighting. Be careful when removing the bulb from its packaging, installing it, or replacing it, as it is made of glass and can break if dropped or roughly handled, resulting in a release of mercury. Always screw and unscrew the bulb by its base (not the glass), and never forcefully twist the bulb into a light socket.

Cleaning Up Broken Fluorescent Bulbs/Tubes and Compact Fluorescent Bulbs

If a fluorescent bulb should break, it is important to follow safe procedures for proper clean-up and disposal, as outlined below.



Never use a vacuum cleaner to clean-up broken fluorescent pieces and always dispose of them properly at a household hazardous waste collection site.

1. First, isolate and ventilate the area.

- Keep people and pets away from the area around the broken material so that mercury residue is not accidentally tracked to other areas.
- Turn off all fans, heating ventilation and air conditioning systems.
- Open a window (provided there is no strong breeze) and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.

2. Carefully clean up residue and glass pieces.

- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment, such as rubber gloves, safety glasses, old clothing or coveralls, and a dust mask (if you have one) to keep bulb residue and glass from being inhaled.
- Carefully remove the larger pieces (using tweezers if necessary) and place them in a sturdy, sealed, air-tight container.

- Collect smaller pieces and dust residue using stiff paper or cardboard, or a disposable dustpan and brush. Put all material into the sturdy, sealed, air-tight container.
- Pat the area with sticky side of duct, packing or masking tape. Then wipe the area with a damp cloth or paper towels to pick up fine particles.
- Put all waste and clean-up materials in the secure container. Place any contaminated clothes, footwear, or fabric in a plastic bag for disposal and seal properly.
- Wash hands or shower after clean-up procedure.

3. For carpeted areas, clean-up glass and residue as above.

- Protect area for a couple of weeks until any mercury vapor is ventilated away and the carpeting can be vacuumed safely.

4. Dispose of materials properly.

- Store the sealed container and plastic bag in a place well out of children's reach while awaiting disposal, for example, in a garage or basement.
- Take the materials to a household hazardous waste collection site. Contact your local municipality for information on household hazardous waste collection sites, or other disposal options that may be available.
- Do not throw broken CFLs away in household trash!



For more information, contact the New Hampshire Pollution Prevention Program at (603) 271-6460 or nhppp@des.nh.gov; or visit the [NHDES Mercury in the Environment webpage](#).