

Are Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs really Worth the Hype?

OPC Sheds Light on Energy Efficient Light Bulbs

The Office of the People's Counsel (OPC) is committed to helping District of Columbia residents make their homes more "Energy Efficient and Environmentally Conscious." As a part of this commitment, the Office is helping utility ratepayers identify products and services they can use to help combat rising energy costs and the push to make their homes more energy efficient. While there are a number of costly home improvements such as solar roof paneling or replacing all of your home appliances with Energy Star products, there are also less costly energy saving options that are available. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, "Lighting accounts for close to 20 percent of the average home's electric bill." So we at OPC have decided that it's time to "shed some light on energy efficient light bulbs."

What are compact fluorescent light bulbs?

- Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs, or CFLs as they are commonly known, are spiral shaped light bulbs designed to use less energy and reduce the amount of greenhouse gas emissions.

What is the difference between Traditional Incandescent Bulbs and CFLs?

- CFLs supply the same amount of light as incandescent bulbs, but use about 75 percent less energy and last up to 10 times longer.¹
- If every home in America replaced one incandescent light bulb with an Energy Star qualified CFL, in one year it would save enough energy to light more than 3 million homes and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to more than 800,000 cars.²

Do CFLs really last for 5-8 years as advertised?

- If you look on the package most CFLs will boast a life span of 5 to 8 years, however, if you read the fine print you find out that this calculation is based on 4 hour a day usage.
- Modern CFLs typically have a life span of between 6,000 and 15,000 hours, whereas incandescent lamps are usually manufactured to have a life span of 750 hours or 1000 hours.³

Is the quality of light given off by CFL's different from those of Incandescent Bulbs?

- Consumers will notice that like incandescent bulbs, CFLs are labeled soft white, cool white, or daylight (which is similar to bright white).
- Many people prefer incandescent bulbs because they have a color index that is closest to sunlight, which is 100. Compact fluorescent bulbs, on the other hand, have use a color index from the low to mid-80's.
- In addition to color index, lighting is also dependent on Kelvin temperatures; the higher the temperature the brighter the light given off by that particular bulb. CFL's with a

¹ Katherine Salant, "Consumers Warm to Energy-Saving Bulbs, but Quality of Light Is a Hot-Button Issue", *The Washington Post*, October 6, 2007, Personal Journal, F14.

² http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Compact_fluorescent_lamp

Kelvin temperature of 2,700 to 3,000 are good for warm and relaxing atmospheres, while those with 5,000 are ideal for reading and projects that require bright lighting to complete.

I heard CFLs contain mercury is that true?

- Yes, compact fluorescents contain a small amount of mercury, which aid them in being efficient lighting sources.

Do I have to take extra precautions when handling or disposing of them?

- The Environmental Protection Agency recommends that consumers recycle CFLs either through their local hazardous waste centers, which may be contacted by phone at 866-666-6850, or on the web at www.lamprecycle.org for additional locations.
- In the District of Columbia, Eco-Green Living is implementing a collection program to accept CFLs for recycling. CFLs can now be taken to the store located at 1469 Church Street, NW on Monday-Saturday (hours: 11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.). For additional information, please call: (202) 234-7110. Also retailers such as IKEA recycle CFLs.
- If you must dispose of a CFL yourself; use disposable rubber gloves, wipe the area with a damp cloth (never use a vacuum cleaner) and place the bulb in two plastic sealed bags prior to placing them in outside trash receptacles.