

What to Do if a Fluorescent Bulb Containing Mercury Breaks in Your Home or Place of Employment

Compact fluorescent bulbs (CFL) and fluorescent tube lights contain a small amount of mercury that is sealed within the glass tubing. If a bulb breaks in your home or at work a small amount of mercury vapor is released. If the bulb isn't properly cleaned up the mercury vapor will continue to be released.

Below are the steps that the EPA recommends taking to cleanup and dispose of fluorescent light bulbs.

Cleanup and Disposal of Fluorescent Bulbs

Note: These are the most important steps to take when cleaning up a broken CFL bulb. See the attached document for a more detailed version.

1. Before cleanup
 - a. Have people and pets leave the room.
 - b. Shut off the forced central heating and air-conditioning system if it is on
 - c. Air out the room for 5 to 10 minutes by opening a window or door
 - d. Collect the following materials to clean-up the bulb
 - A piece of cardboard or stiff paper
 - Sticky tape
 - Damp paper towels or wet wipes for hard services
 - A sealable plastic bag or glass jar with a metal lid
2. During cleanup
 - a. DO NOT VACUUM unless broken glass remains after all other cleanup steps have been taken. Vacuuming could spread mercury-containing powder or mercury vapor.
 - b. Be sure that you collect all broken glass and visible powder
 - c. Place the materials that you cleaned up in a sealable container.
3. After cleanup
 - a. Place all bulb debris and cleanup materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of. Be prompt! Do not leave any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors.
 - b. IDEM strongly encourages recycling your CFL bulbs whether it is broken or not. Your waste collector may not want you to dispose of CFL bulbs with your household waste either. Please check with your household waste collector before disposing of the broken bulb. You can contact the Northeast Indiana Solid Waste Management District toll free at 1-800-777-5462 or visit their website at <http://www.niswmd.org/> to learn more about the fluorescent bulb recycling programs.
 - c. If practical, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the heating and air conditioning off for several hours.

Please view [Mercury Spill Information and Cleanup Guidance](#) for more detailed information

Tips to Prevent CFL Bulbs Breaking

Follow these general practices when handling CFL bulbs. Remember it is considered unlawful to intentionally break CFL bulbs!

- Allow working CFL bulbs to cool down before handling
- Do not hold the glass tubing when handling a CFL, instead screw and unscrew the CFL by holding the plastic or ceramic base if possible.
- Do not over-tighten the bulb when screwing it in
- Never forcefully twist the glass tubing
- You can choose not to install CFL bulbs where they could easily be broken. LED and halogen bulbs are alternatives to purchasing CFL bulbs.
- Some CFL bulbs have a glass or plastic covering over the spiral or folded glass tube. These bulbs can be more durable if they are dropped
- Use a drop cloth (plastic sheet or beach towel) when changing CFL in case it breaks. The drop cloth will help prevent mercury contamination of nearby surfaces and can be bundled with the debris for disposal.