

# FACT SHEET: Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs

## How to best use Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs):

- For maximum savings, CFLs should be installed in high use areas. For maximum life, CFLs work best in locations where the light is left on for at least 15 minutes at a time.
- In dimmable fixtures, you must use CFLs labeled for use with dimmers.
- In the cold or outdoors, use CFLs that are rated for low temperatures.



## What precautions should I take when using CFLs in my home?

Always screw and unscrew the CFL by its base (not the glass) and never forcefully twist the CFL into a light socket. CFLs are made of glass and can break if dropped or roughly handled.



**CAUTION:** DO NOT VACUUM OR SWEEP - to clean up the broken lamp, this may spread any mercury vapor that is present to other rooms. Keep all people and pets away from the breakage area.

## What to do if your bulb breaks:

By following the directions below, you can safely clean up a broken CFL. It is not necessary to hire a professional for the cleanup.

### For breakage on a hard surface:

1. Ventilate the room by closing all interior doors and vents, opening windows and any exterior doors in the room and leaving the room (restrict access) for at least 15 minutes.
2. Remove all materials you can and don't use a vacuum cleaner.
  - a. wear disposable gloves, if available.
  - b. carefully scoop up the glass fragments and powder with a stiff paper or cardboard (such as playing cards or index cards).
  - c. pick up any remaining small pieces of glass and powder using sticky tape (such as masking or duct tape).
  - d. wipe the area clean with a damp paper towel or disposable wet wipe.
3. Place all cleanup materials (cardboard, gloves, tape, etc.) into a glass or rigid container with a lid. If a glass or rigid container is not available, place all cleanup materials in a plastic bag (and double bag) and seal it. Store the container or bag outside of the house in an area inaccessible to children.
4. Wash your hands.
5. Contact your local solid waste district, alliance, or municipality for proper disposal; or call **1-800-974-9559** (dial one) or **(802) 241-3888** (for a list of districts see [mercvt.org](http://mercvt.org) "proper disposal").
6. Leave windows in the affected room open as long as practical (weather permitting).

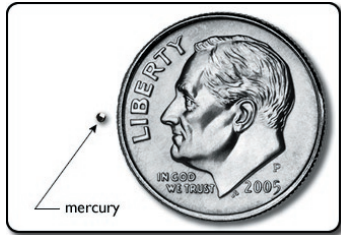
### For breakage on carpet:

1. Complete steps 1 through 6 above.
2. If rug is removable, take it outside, shake, and air out as long as practical.
3. (After cleanup and the room has been ventilated) The first time you vacuum the area where the CFL was broken, shut the door to the room or close off the area from as much of the rest of the house as possible and ventilate the room when vacuuming. Remove the vacuum bag once done cleaning the area, wipe vacuum with wet wipe and put the bag and/or vacuum debris, including cleaning materials, into a plastic bag and double bag and store the bag outside the house in an area inaccessible to children. Contact your local solid waste district, alliance or municipality as instructed in #5 above.
4. After vacuuming, keep window open, door closed and children/pets out of room.
5. Consider removal of carpeting section where the breakage has occurred as a precaution when there are infants, small children and pregnant women present. For questions, call the Vermont Department of Health at **1-800-439-8550** (toll-free in VT) or **(802) 863-7220** (dial zero). During non-work hours, call the Northern New England Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q. How much mercury is in a compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL)?**

**A.** A trace amount of mercury is contained in each CFL, less than 5 mg. The amount of mercury in a CFL is 1/5 the amount in a watch battery. Mercury is commonly found in thermometers, thermostats, and button cell batteries. Older household thermometers contain about 500 milligrams (mg) of mercury. It would take over 100 CFLs to equal that amount.



*Size comparison of mercury found in a typical compact fluorescent light bulb sold in the U.S.*

**Q. Why use CFLs?**

**A.** They use approximately 66-75% less energy than an incandescent bulb and they last up to 6-10 times longer than a standard incandescent bulb.

**Q. Is it harmful to be in the room where a CFL has broken?**

**A.** It is best to avoid exposure to mercury. If a CFL breaks, follow the instructions on the front side of this form. If you have any health related questions about bulb breakage in your home, call the Vermont Department of Health at **1-800-439-8550** or **(802) 863-7220** (dial zero). During non-work hours, call the Northern New England Poison Center at **1-800-222-1222**.

**Q. Should I use incandescent bulbs that don't contain mercury instead of CFLs in order to be safe?**

**A.** No mercury is released when CFLs are in use. The risk of exposure to mercury from the occasional broken CFL bulb is very small. Using CFLs reduces the amount of mercury in the environment by reducing the amount of electricity that power companies need to produce.

**Q. Where can I recycle my burned out CFLs?**

**A.** You can bring your spent CFLs to many local hardware stores and lighting retail stores (limit 6 bulbs per customer visit). For a list of participating stores see: [www.mercvt.org](http://www.mercvt.org) or [newbulbintown.com](http://newbulbintown.com). You can also contact your local solid waste district, alliance, or municipality.

**For disposal information contact:**

**Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation**  
(802) 241-3888 or call 1-800-974-9559 (dial one)

**For health questions call:**

**Vermont Department of Health**  
1-800-439-8550 or (802) 863-7220 (dial zero)

**For Disposal Information In your Area Call:**

**Addison County Solid Waste District**  
(802) 388-2333

**Bennington County Regional Commission (BCRC)**  
(802) 375-2576

**Central Vermont Solid Waste District**  
1-800-730-9475 or (802) 229-9383

**Chittenden Solid Waste District**  
(802) 872-8111

**Greater Upper Valley Solid Waste District**  
(802) 296-3688

**Lamoille Regional Solid Waste District**  
(802) 888-7317

**Londonderry Group**  
(802) 824-6304

**Mad River Solid Waste Alliance**  
(802) 244-7373

**Northeast Kingdom Waste Management District**  
1-800-734-4602 or (802) 626-3532

**Northwest Vermont Solid Waste District**  
(802) 524-5986

**Rutland County Solid Waste District**  
(802) 775-7209

**Solid Waste Alliance Community (SWAC)**  
(518) 854-9702

**Southern Windsor/Windham Counties SWMD**  
(802) 674-9235

**Tri-Town Agreement**  
(802) 728-5433

**White River Alliance**  
(802) 234-9340

**Windham Solid Waste District**  
(802) 257-0272

Please visit [www.mercvt.org](http://www.mercvt.org) or [newbulbintown.com](http://newbulbintown.com) to search for your local disposal site by city or town.