

When the bulb breaks, the cleanup will rock

Compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) have been marketed to employers as a way to reduce energy consumption and save money. However, CFLs create some challenges, too. Because CFLs contain mercury, they cannot simply be thrown away, but must be managed according to EPA's universal waste regulations at 40 CFR Part 273.

There is also the issue of what occurs when a CFL breaks.

If a CFL breaks at your workplace, you'll have to take precautions to make sure workers are not exposed to hazardous mercury vapor. EPA has published detailed cleanup instructions that include steps to take before, during, and after a break.

Before cleanup:

- Have employees leave the area.
- Air out the room for 5 to 10 minutes by opening windows and doors to the outdoors.
- Shut off central forced air heating or cooling systems.
- Gather materials needed for the cleanup:
 - Stiff paper or cardboard;
 - Sticky tape;
- Damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes; and
- A glass jar with a metal lid or a sealable plastic bag.

During cleanup:

- Do not vacuum the mess until after all other cleanup steps have been taken. Vacuuming could spread mercury vapor throughout the area.
- Collect all broken glass and visible powder by using the stiff paper or cardboard to scoop fragments into the glass jar or plastic bag. Use sticky tape (such as duct tape) to pick up any remaining residue.
- Place all cleanup materials in a sealable container.

After cleanup:

- Place the sealed container in an outdoor trash container or a protected area until the materials can be disposed of.
- Check with your local government or authorized waste disposal facility about what to do with the waste.
- If practical, continue to air out the area where the bulb was broken and leave the heating and cooling system shut down for several hours