

Mercury in Low Energy Light Bulbs Factsheet

Hazards

The kind of light bulb we've all been used to for generations, made of tungsten, will be phased out in the UK over the next five years. The Government wants everyone to go over to low-energy bulbs because they are much more efficient and clean to produce. But some people have been quite concerned to hear that that the new type of bulbs contain mercury.

This factsheet is to reassure you about the use, disposal and breakage of the new light bulbs.

The first thing to say is that mercury in lamps is nothing new and has been used in fluorescent tubes for decades.

Putting the hazard level into perspective

The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), states that whilst no amount of mercury is good for you, the very small amount contained in a single modern low-energy bulb is unlikely to cause any harm, even if it is broken.

The lighting industry and the government say the risk of mercury pollution posed by low-energy bulbs is minimal.

What do I do if one is broken?

- Clear the room and open the windows for at least 15 minutes
- Do not use a vacuum cleaner, but use a dustpan and brush, brushing away from your face. Put everything you've swept up in a cardboard box, taking care not to breathe in any fumes.
- Wipe the area where the bulb dropped with a damp cloth, then add that to the box and seal it. Do not use the cloth for anything else. You must not put the box in the general waste collection as mercury counts as hazardous waste.

Recycling low-energy light bulbs

Low-energy light bulbs broken or otherwise must never be disposed of to landfill, which is where they would go if you put them out in the general household waste.

If you live in South Oxfordshire, you can dispose of them at Drayton, Redbridge and Oakley Wood disposal sites.

Replacement Bulbs

Replacement bulbs for dedicated (three or four pin) fittings can be obtained from B & Q and on line at BLT Direct, Lamps 2u Direct and the Light Bulb Company.

If you'd like to know more

For more information, please contact Oxfordshire County Council on 08450 504450 or your waste disposal authority if you are a Soha resident living elsewhere.