

Handling Broken Fluorescent Lamps Containing Mercury



Fluorescent lamps contain mercury vapor. Mercury is not released when a lamp is intact or in use. The only time mercury may be released is when the lamp is broken. If all of the mercury in one fluorescent lamp could be collected as a bead, that bead would be about the size of the period at the end of this sentence. Breathing small amounts of mercury over a period of months or years can affect your health (see web link below for more information). The mercury released from a broken fluorescent lamp is unlikely to cause health effects because the amount of mercury is so small that the vapor is rapidly diluted in air.

If you break a fluorescent lamp, promptly clean it up to avoid spreading broken glass and other debris. In general, you can clean up a broken lamp following the steps below.

Cleaning Up a Broken Fluorescent Lamp

- *Only the person(s) cleaning up the breakage should be in the room. Keep other people and pets away to avoid spreading glass and other debris.*
- *Avoid cuts and other injuries from broken glass and sharp debris by wearing gloves and eye protection.*
- *Carefully pick up larger pieces of glass and debris and place them on a paper towel or newspaper.*
- *Pick up smaller pieces of glass and dust with pieces of sticky tape and place them on the paper.*
- *If the debris is on a hard surface, wipe with damp paper towels and place the paper towels on the paper.*
- *If you vacuum the area, remove the vacuum bag afterwards (or empty and wipe the canister) and put the bag or vacuum debris in a plastic bag.*
- *Carefully fold everything into the paper and place it in a plastic bag.*
- *Seal the plastic bag(s) and promptly dispose of the waste in an outdoor trash bin.*

Disposing of Fluorescent Lamps and Waste

Everyone is strongly encouraged to recycle their used fluorescent lamps, although households may dispose of broken and intact fluorescent lamps in the regular trash. Contact your local Solid Waste Authority and ask if a Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day is scheduled in your area, or check the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) web page, www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8485.html.



Regulations restrict how businesses may dispose of fluorescent lamps. Detailed information on disposal of mercury and mercury-containing items is available from the NYSDEC Bureau of Hazardous Waste Regulation – Waste Determination and Analysis Section, 518-402-8633 or 800-462-6553. For questions about this fact sheet, contact the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) at 1-800-458-1158, extension 27810. For additional information on mercury and health, visit the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry web site at: <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/phs46.html>