

From Sun Senior News, March 2011, reprinted by permission

The Future Dims for Incandescents

Neighbors InDeed's Pros & Cons on CFLs

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There's a run on the market for incandescent light bulbs these days.

A 2007 federal law required conversion to energy-efficient light bulbs by the year 2014, paving the way for a huge market for CFLs. The EU, and dozens of other countries – led by Australia, New Zealand, and Canada – have legislated similar curbs on incandescent bulbs. All this has created quite a stir that even has politicians weighing in!

Neighbors InDeed has weighed in. We stand behind our recommendations in the April 2010 Sun Senior News, in which we suggested considering the advantages of CFL bulbs (for many of your household fixtures), and scheduling a Neighbors InDeed's "CFL Audit," in which you can ask for a qualified Handy Helper to assess which bulbs warrant changing to CFLs and how much money and energy you will save from the change-over. We estimate a savings of hundreds of your energy dollars by taking this step. We continue to offer our CFL audit, so call 223-2763 and we will set it up!

We're back again, because, as 2014 gets closer, we're hearing more and more misinformation over the light bulb issue. Consider a few of the most common pros, cons, and myths regarding the most readily available alternative to incandescent light bulbs: Compact Fluorescent Lamps (CFLs).

PROS

1. Typically, 75% energy savings (over traditional incandescents)
2. CFLs last 5 to 8 times longer (~6,000 to 15,000 hours)
3. They emit significantly less heat
4. CFLs are no longer prohibitively costly

The four "pros" here are all universally supported in numerous consumer laboratories and research studies, so really, there's no argument here.

CONS

1. They don't instantly produce their maximum light output

2. Most CFLs cannot be used with light dimmers
3. They must be safely recycled since they contain mercury
4. The “curly Q” shape just doesn’t look good

If these drawbacks tend to scare you off, consider doing some research, which should reveal the following:

1. If you’re willing to wait a few seconds for your light to get up to full brightness, the short “warm-up” time should not be a big inconvenience.
2. Neighbors InDeed concedes that CFLs do not function well with dimmer switches, so in this case, keep your incandescent bulbs for those fixtures.
3. CFLs contain a minute amount of mercury, and therefore they must be recycled at stores like Home Depot, Lowe’s, and the Western Placer Waste Management Authority site on Athens Road.
4. Finally, if those squiggly shapes (“spirals”) bother you, consider CFLs that look very much like a traditional bulb (see illustration).

MYTHS

1. They produce an annoying, flickering light that drives you crazy
2. They produce dim light that isn’t as bright as incandescents
3. They have a high failure rate
4. Their mercury levels are dangerous and highly toxic

With every new technology, there are always some myths to contend with.

1. That flicker that you associate with some of the CFLs of a decade ago has been corrected in current manufacturing. If you get one that flickers, return it for a free exchange.
2. CFLs come in three different brightness levels to suit your own preference in a given area in your house. In some cases, you won’t know the difference between a CFL and an incandescent once it’s up to full speed.
3. Some CFLs are poorly manufactured – watch out! Make sure your CFLs carry the “Energy Star” label, which will ensure you have a high quality bulb. If one does fail, you can return it and get a replacement, free of charge!
4. A CFL bulb contains up to 5 milligrams of mercury (1/6000th of an ounce). For comparison, consider that a fever thermometer contains about 100 times more

mercury. The mercury in a CFL is sealed, so no mercury is released from an intact bulb. And some manufacturers have now dropped the mercury content in CFLs to a mere 1 milligram per bulb!

Because of the hazards involved with the release of mercury into the air, a broken CFL bulb should be treated with care. Check out the EPA's recommended steps for cleanup and disposal, which include allowing time in an aired-out room for any airborne mercury to dissipate.

www.epa.gov/cfl/cflcleanup.html

How many Handy Helpers does it take to change your light bulbs to CFLs?
Answer: One! Call Neighbors InDeed at 223-2763 and save yourself a bunch of money!