

FAQ's - Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFL)



1. Why is the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) giving out CFLs?

The *Make the Switch* program was launched to help NWT residents help the environment, save money and save energy. It is estimated that *Make the Switch* will offset 90,000 litres of diesel fuel and reduce 250 tonnes of CO₂. In addition, CFLs use 2/3 less energy than standard incandescent light bulbs and last up to 10 times longer, reducing the amount of packaging and used bulbs that ends up in our landfills. Replacing a 60-watt incandescent bulb with a 13-watt CFL will save you approximately \$12.50/year in energy costs.

2. Do CFLs contain mercury? How much?

CFLs are safe to use in your home. No mercury is released when the bulbs are in use and they pose no danger to you or your family when properly used. CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing – an average of 5 milligrams.

Compare the Mercury Content in these Household Items!

A Compact Fluorescent bulb	5 milligrams
A watch battery	25 milligrams
A tooth filling	500 milligrams
Household Thermometer	500 – 2,000 milligrams
Household Thermostat	600 milligrams

3. How do I dispose of a burnt out CFL?

The GNWT is working towards increasing recycling options for CFL bulbs. In the meantime, CFLs, like paint, batteries, thermostats and other household chemicals should be taken to the appropriate area in a landfill.

ENERGY STAR qualified CFLs have a warranty. If the bulb fails within the warranty period, return it to your retailer for a full refund.

4. What do I do if I break a CFL?

Natural Resources Canada states that *a spill of the amount of mercury found in Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs does not usually pose an immediate health risk to you or your family. However, proper clean up and disposal is required. You can minimize the risk of mercury contamination by following these basic guidelines.*

When a CFL breaks:

- **Open windows (where possible) to ventilate the room**
- **Wear rubber gloves and scoop or sweep up the debris with a stiff paper or cardboard and place the debris in a sealed plastic bag.**

On a hard surface:

- **Wipe the area with a damp paper towel and put it all in the sealed plastic bag.**
- **Dispose of the bag in accordance with local disposal options.**

On a carpet:

- **Use sticky tape (such as duct tape) to pick up any small pieces of glass or fine particles, then if necessary, vacuum the area and immediately dispose of the vacuum bag, debris, and sticky tape in a sealed plastic bag.**
- **Dispose of the bag in accordance with local disposal options.**

5. Are CFLs a fire hazard?

In Canada, all electrical products, including CFLs must meet specific requirements for electrical safety, fire and shock hazard. Products that meet safety requirements contain the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and Underwriters Laboratory (UL) certification marks on the package and on the bulb itself.

Very few fires are attributed to CFL bulbs. Recently, the Ontario Office of the Fire Marshal reported that no fires have resulted from failed CFLs.

6. I've heard stories of CFL's smoking, should I be worried?

There are some cases where CFLs have turned black and emitted smoke, but in most instances this is a controlled response to the end of their life. CFLs contain electronic components which are required by UL to prevent overheating when they fail. If a light bulb fails, this mechanism, which acts as a fuse, kicks in. When that happens, the CFL base can discolor, and give off a small puff of smoke as well as release an unpleasant odour. In some cases, the plastic at the base of a CFL can melt and turn black, but major manufacturers have designed the base with special flame retardant plastics that do not burn or drop molten particles. In cases where this situation occurs, it is a sign that the bulb's end-of-life mechanism worked as it should have.

