

Fluorescents lights are worth the cost

By Lois Courchaine

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LATELY I'VE BEEN getting lots of questions about lighting, and it's no wonder. There is a big push to switch from incandescent bulbs to energy-efficient lighting, such as compact fluorescents (CFLs).

A few years ago, when we remodeled our kitchen, we put fluorescents in as the main lighting source, and now we're replacing our burned-out incandescent bulbs with CFLs. Since they use a lot less energy and last so much longer, we're helping the environment and saving money, too.

Fluorescent lights can last up to 10 times longer than traditional lighting. On average, a CFL will burn for up to 10,000 hours. While it is true that CFLs cost more to purchase than the others, over the long run they can save you big bucks. All things considered, they cost about 75 percent less to light your house than incandescent lights.

While the environmental and monetary benefits of energy efficient lighting are huge, there are also some associated "costs." All fluorescents lights, whether tubes or CFLs contain small amounts of mercury, which the State of California has determined to be detrimental to the environment when put into landfills. So when the bulbs eventually burn out, what do you do with them if you can't put them into your garbage or recycling cart?

The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District's Household Hazardous Waste Facility in Martinez will take them. And we're lucky enough to have a couple

of nice retailers that will accept them (from residents only). Orchard Supply Hardware at 1550 Canyon Road in Moraga accepts small quantities of fluorescents, and they also accept batteries for recycling. And I've heard that Home Depot/Yarbirds stores in Alamo and San Ramon also have collection programs. Check with your local hardware store to see if they have a program.

But I think that the issue is bigger than where we can take our spent lights. Fluorescents are just one of myriad products that the State of California says are toxic and cannot be put in the landfill. Batteries, electronics and medical injection devices (sharps) are also banned from the garbage.

This puts a burden on local governments, and consumers too. Making collection programs convenient is the key for ensuring that all these devices are properly disposed of. I just wish that the manufacturers would take some responsibility and help make disposing of these items convenient.

If you would like more information on how you can help make collection of toxic products more convenient, visit caproductstewardship.org/ or www.productstewardship.us/.

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Energy efficiency
For more information about fluorescent lighting versus incandescent, visit these Web sites: http://www.energy.ca.gov/2005publications/CEC-400-2005-005/chapters_4q/6_Lighting.pdf [nemesislonestar.org/reference/electricity/fluorescent/efficien-](http://www.nemesislonestar.org/reference/electricity/fluorescent/efficien-)

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