



Consumer Corner

by Illinois Attorney General LISA MADIGAN



COMPACT FLUORESCENT LIGHT BULBS: REDUCE ENERGY USE AND SAVE ON YOUR NEXT ELECTRIC BILL

There are many small changes you can make in your home that will have a significant positive impact on the environment and save you money. This month's Consumer Corner focuses on one such change—replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) to reduce electricity use. You can maximize the benefits of this change by installing the CFLs in the most often used areas of your home.

Q. With the “green” movement in full swing, I am looking for ways to be more environmentally friendly without changing my overall lifestyle. I'm especially interested in reducing my energy consumption and related costs. Can you recommend any simple steps that I can take to benefit both the environment and my pocketbook at the same time?

A. Sure. While there are many changes you can make to help the environment, switching from incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs is a simple yet effective way to reduce your electricity use and save money on your next electric utility bill. By reducing electricity use, you also help to limit the production of greenhouse gases and other air pollutants that negatively affect the environment.

According to the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, CFLs not only use far less electricity than incandescent bulbs; they also last up to seven times longer. Through reduced electricity bills and fewer replacement bulbs, you will save up to several times the purchase price of a CFL for each year of use.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs not only save you money on your electric bill, but they also reduce the amount of pollution – including greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, and mercury – released into the environment when electricity is generated. According to the U.S. EPA, if every American home replaced just one light bulb with a CFL, we would save enough energy to light more than 3 million homes for a year, reduce more than \$600 million in annual energy costs, and prevent greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to that of more than 800,000 cars.

CFLs are also easy to incorporate into your current lifestyle: they come in a variety of shapes and sizes to accommodate almost any fixture and provide warm or soft white light. To choose the proper CFL for your fixture, simply find a CFL that is labeled as equivalent to the incandescent bulb you are replacing. While you shop, keep an eye out for the Energy Star label: Energy Star qualified CFLs are required to meet safety and performance criteria that ensure reliability.

When CFL bulbs burn out, they need to be disposed of properly because they contain a small amount of mercury that is critical to their efficiency. The best thing to do with a used CFL is to recycle it. For information about fluorescent light bulb recycling programs in Illinois, check with your local government and area stores that sell CFLs. For more information on what to do if a CFL breaks in your home, visit the U.S. EPA's Web site at www.epa.gov/mercury/spills/index.htm#fluorescent.

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Information adapted from www.epa.gov and www.aceee.org.