

Inside Grundy County
By Bill Arndorfer
Butler-Grundy County Extension Educator
September 3, 2010

Using Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs) reduces the amount of electricity used in the home. CFLs are being used in more homes every day and are a great way to save energy. However, you should know the proper way to clean up a broken CFL bulb. It requires more steps than a traditional light bulb. When we received that question in the extension office, I went to the following website for the answer:

http://www.energystar.gov/ia/partners/promotions/change_light/downloads/Fact_Sheet_Mercury.pdf. All CFL bulbs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing – an average of 4 milligrams. By comparison, older thermometers contain about 500 milligrams of mercury – an amount equal to the mercury in 125 CFLs.

The EPA recommends the following steps when cleaning up a broken CFL.

1. Before Clean-up: Air out the Room
 - Have people and pets leave the room, and don't let anyone walk through the breakage area on their way out.
 - Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.
 - Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.
2. Clean-Up Steps for Hard Surfaces
 - Carefully scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with metal lid or in a sealed plastic bag.
 - Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass pieces and powder.
 - Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place towels in the glass jar or plastic bag.
 - Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.
3. Clean-up Steps for Carpeting or Rug:
 - Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with metal lid or in a sealed plastic bag.
 - Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
 - If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken.
 - Remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister), and put the bag or vacuum debris in a sealed plastic bag.
4. Clean-up Steps for Clothing, Bedding, etc.:
 - If clothing or bedding materials come in direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from inside the bulb that may stick to the fabric, the clothing or bedding should be thrown away. Do not wash such clothing or bedding because mercury fragments in the clothing may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage.

- You can, however, wash clothing or other materials that have been exposed to the mercury vapor from a broken CFL, such as the clothing you are wearing when you cleaned up the broken CFL, as long as that clothing has not come into direct contact with the materials from the broken bulb.
 - If shoes come into direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from the bulb, wipe them off with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place the towels or wipes in a glass jar or plastic bag for disposal.
5. Disposal of Clean-up Materials
- Immediately place all clean-up materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area for the next normal trash pickup.
 - Wash your hands after disposing of the jars or plastic bags containing clean-up materials.
 - Check with your local or state government about disposal requirements in your specific area. Some states do not allow such trash disposal. Instead, they require that broken and unbroken mercury-containing bulbs be taken to a local recycling center.
6. Future Cleaning of Carpeting or Rug: Air Out the Room During and After Vacuuming
- The next several times you vacuum, shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system and open a window before vacuuming.
 - Keep the central heating/air conditioning system shut off and the window open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is completed.

For more information, contact the Grundy County office of ISU Extension at 319-824-6979.

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