

## Handling and Disposing of Fluorescent Lamps

September 2008

### **Introduction:**

Spent fluorescent bulbs, high-intensity discharge (HID), neon, mercury vapor, high pressure sodium and metal halide lamps can be classified as hazardous waste because they typically contain mercury. Recent advances in manufacturing have reduced the mercury levels in some products but have not eliminated it. Tossing spent lamps in the trash is no longer an option. It is important for business owners and employees to recognize that the improper handling of waste lamps containing mercury is unsafe and unlawful. By implementing simple waste handling practices your business can reduce environmental releases of mercury, improve company image and avoid heavy fines.

### **Mercury:**

Mercury can be released into the environment when certain lamps are broken, incinerated or land filled. Released mercury can enter the air, soil and water. From here mercury can enter the food chain and ultimately the human body. Mercury poisoning can damage the central nervous system and other organs in the body.

### **Regulation:**

On March 15, 2002 the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation adopted regulations allowing hazardous waste lamps to be handled under the Universal Waste Rule. A generator of hazardous waste lamps is required to determine if such waste is to be handled as a universal waste or a traditional hazardous waste at the time it is created. Alternating back and forth under each approach is not allowed. Once a determination has been made it must be adhered to. It is important to note that businesses can benefit from a reduced regulatory burden and costs by handling lamps as universal wastes.

### **How Small Quantity Generators can handle Lamps containing Mercury under Universal Waste Rule:**

- (1) Waste lamps are not counted towards your generator status.
- (2) Save original boxes or other like containers that prevent damage during storage.
- (3) Close and secure boxes/containers with tape.
- (4) Do not wrap multiple bulbs together with tape or rubber bands.
- (5) Label waste lamp boxes/containers with the phrase: "Universal Waste-Lamp(s)," include initial date of generated contents.



New York State  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
FACILITIES  
CORPORATION

- (6) Designate an area at your facility for storage of waste lamps.
- (7) Establish employee training on the proper handling, storage and cleanup of spent bulbs.
- (8) Store less than 11,000lb of universal waste on site at any one time and for less than one year.
- (9) Businesses may self-transport or ship universal wastes through a conventional carrier in quantities of less than 500lbs.
- (10) Recycle used lamps containing mercury if at all possible.
- (11) Broken bulbs must be managed as hazardous waste, not universal waste.

### **What to do if a Fluorescent Lamp Breaks:**

Breakage of mercury-containing lamps may lead to the release of dangerous mercury contaminants. Improper cleanup can be dangerous to the health of building occupants. Here are some easy steps to complete a safe cleanup at your business:

- (1) Clean up broken lamps promptly.
- (2) Wear gloves and use a damp cloth to clean up powder.
- (3) Place shards and spilled powder in puncture-resistant, sealed, plastic bag or bucket.
- (4) Place clean-up materials in a separate sealed container.
- (5) Never vacuum lamps, it will spread mercury throughout area.
- (6) Do not throw broken lamps in regular trash - they must be managed as hazardous waste.

Need help determining your generator status, handling other wastes or finding a facility that recycles hazardous waste lamps?

Contact us at the ***Small Business Environmental Assistance Program, NYS Environmental Facilities Corporation, 1-800-780-7227.***

*We can help guide you through complex environmental regulations concerning your business. All of our services are free and confidential.*

\*Certain Small Businesses with less than 100 employees may be exempt and able to dispose of 15 or fewer non-hazardous lamps that pass the toxicity characteristic leaching procedure (TCLP).

---

The information in this fact sheet is intended for general reference only; it is not a full and complete statement of the technical or legal requirements associated with the regulation.

***Helping New York's Small Businesses understand and comply with environmental regulations.***

**Small Business Environmental Assistance Program**

**NYS ENVIRONMENTAL FACILITIES CORPORATION**

625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12207-2997

1-800-780-7227 / 518-402-7462

**sbeap@nysefc.org**

**Governor, David A. Paterson**

**Matthew J. Millea, Acting President**