

A p a r t m e n t

SAFETY NOTES



SPOKANE FIRE DEPARTMENT

APRIL 2011

Spotlight on CFLs



The Spokane Fire Department has received a number of inquiries regarding the safety of energy-saving compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs). Most of the questions arose as individuals noticed burn marks on the base of their CFLs or heard of recalls. Recognizing that many households now use CFLs rather than the more common incandescent light bulb, we have done a little research to help answer some of these concerns.

CFLs (both tubular and spiral models) do not pose any added fire risk with ordinary usage. However, it is important for users to recognize that these bulbs act differently from ordinary light bulbs at the end of their life. While we are accustomed to a regular bulb quickly popping or turning gray when it needs to be replaced, CFL bulbs often burn out by gradually growing dimmer. However, they may sometimes be more dramatic and burn out when their ballast overheats by emitting a loud “pop”, a distinct odor and some smoke. The base of the bulb may also appear burned. CFL bulbs should be replaced when these failure signals first appear.



It is wise to buy CFLs that have an ENERGY STAR[®] rating to assure the bulbs have met basic safety in design and manufacturing standards to assure optimal energy savings. UL (Underwriters Laboratories) listing is not mandatory for CFLs.

To date, there have been at least two recalls of CFLs for fire safety hazards. However, the GLOBE Electric recall involved bulbs that were never sold in the U.S. The TRISONIC recall of bulbs manufactured in 2007-08 did involve two fires. Their design problem has since been corrected. For additional recall information, check www.cpsc.gov.

Since compact fluorescent lamps are more energy efficient than incandescent bulbs some countries now sell only CFLs.

continued 

However, there are important safety steps that consumers must know **before** they begin using CFLs:

- ✓ Because there is a small amount of **mercury** in each bulb, they should never be put into the regular garbage pick-up. One broken fluorescent bulb can contaminate 7,000 gallons of water with mercury.
- ✓ Carefully wrap burned out CFLs in paper and either bring them to the Household Hazardous Waste section at the Waste to Energy Facility or take them to a special recycling bin at Lowe's or Home Depot.
- ✓ Know how to clean up a broken CFL before there is any chance the bulb can break.

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) at www.epa.gov/cfl/cflcleanup.html provides detailed directions for cleaning up a broken fluorescent bulb that will surprise, if not stun, most consumers and apartment managers!

A brief version of EPA-recommended cleanup includes the following:

- Remove people and pets from the room, open a window and air the room for at least 15 minutes. Shut off central air or heat.
- Use protective gloves. Scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with lid or sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape to pick up remaining small glass pieces and powder. Then wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wipes. Put towels or wipes into sealed jar or bag.
- Never use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces. If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed on carpeting, also put the collection bag or vacuum debris into a sealed plastic bag.

- For future vacuuming, shut off the central air or heat and keep windows open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is complete.



The Little Light That Could

In 1901 the volunteer firefighters of Livermore, CA received a four-watt light bulb made of hand-blown glass with a carbon filament. It has a marvelous history and continues to burn today in the Livermore-Pleasanton Fire Station #6. This light will mark 110 years of continuous service this coming June 18.

To learn more about “The Firehouse Light”, go to www.centennialbulb.org.

You can sign up for this monthly newsletter, ask a fire-related question or suggest a specific safety topic by contacting Jan Doherty at jdoherly@spokanefire.org or by calling 625-7058.

Access this edition of Apartment Safety Notes as well as back issues at www.spokanefire.org under “Prevention”.



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