

## **When the Bulb Breaks**

### **Federal agency updates advice on cleaning up broken CFLs**

*Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Township News*

Compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFLs, may be much more energy-efficient than their incandescent counterparts, but they have a downside: They are potentially harmful if broken.

CFLs contain a small amount of mercury in the glass tubing. If the tubing breaks, some of the mercury may be released as vapor and pose potential health risks.

Not to fear, however. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released extensive guidance on how to properly clean up broken CFLs. The agency's website has links to a new brochure and step-by-step instructions for safely collecting and disposing of busted bulbs.

The brochure provides the most important steps to reduce exposure to mercury vapor from a broken CFL before, during, and after cleanup. They include leaving and airing out the room where the breakage occurs, shutting off central heating and air conditioning systems, placing all debris and cleanup materials in a sealable container, and placing everything outside in a trash container until it can be disposed of properly. The room must continue to be aired out for several hours with the heating and air conditioning shut off.

The guidelines also apply to other mercury-containing bulbs.

Because broken CFLs pose such a risk, the best practice is to minimize the chance of broken bulbs by:

- switching off bulbs and allowing them to cool before handling them;
- screwing and unscrewing CFLs by holding their plastic or ceramic base, rather than the glass tubing;
- not overtightening CFLs in their sockets;
- not installing CFLs in table and floor lamps that can be easily knocked over or in places where they can be easily broken, such as play areas;
- using CFLs that have a glass or plastic cover over the glass tubing; and
- using a drop cloth when changing a fluorescent light bulb to catch any debris if the bulb should break.

To download the brochure and detailed step-by-step instructions for cleaning up broken fluorescent light bulbs, log onto [www.epa.gov/cflcleanup](http://www.epa.gov/cflcleanup).