

NBSIA Member Services Safety Bulletin

April 2019

SAFE HANDLING OF FLUORESCENT LIGHTS

Fluorescent lamps and tubes contain mercury and are considered hazardous waste in California. About 370 pounds of mercury were released in California in the year 2000 due to breakage during storage and transportation.

It is important to handle fluorescent lamps carefully. Whether installing, removing, storing or transporting—take caution!

Mercury Exposure

- All fluorescent lamps and tubes must be recycled at an authorized recycling facility.
- Never put fluorescent lamps in the trash. They can break and release mercury into the environment.
- Mercury vapors can be absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream.
- People who are particularly close to the breakage are especially at risk.
- Mercury can also be washed by rain water into waterways.

Exercise Caution

- If a fluorescent light goes out, put in a maintenance work order. Never handle the lamp unless you are trained to do so.
- If a fluorescent lamp breaks for any reason, immediately evacuate the area, open windows and doors and call for help. *Do not touch the lamp, glass, or dust!*

Safe Transportation and Storage

- Package fluorescent lamps and tubes carefully when storing and transporting them.
- Do not tape tubes together.
- Store and transport in the original box or another protective container.
- Store them in an area away from rain so that if they break, mercury will not be washed into waterways.



How to Clean Up Broken Lamps and Tubes

- Only authorized staff should clean up broken fluorescent bulbs or lamps.
- *Never use a standard vacuum cleaner to clean up broken fluorescent lamps!* Only vacuums designed specifically for hazardous waste may be used.
- Instead of vacuuming, wear latex gloves and carefully clean up fragments.
- Wipe the area with a damp disposable paper towel to remove all glass fragments and associated mercury.
- Keep all people and animals away from area so that mercury-containing pieces and powder are not tracked into other areas.
- Keep the area well ventilated to disperse any vapor that may escape.
- After clean-up is complete, place all fragments along with cleaning materials into a sealable plastic bag. Wash your hands.
- Remember to recycle both broken and intact fluorescent lamps at an authorized recycling facility.

Sources

<https://www.calrecycle.ca.gov/ReduceWaste/FluoresLamps/#AllLampsHaz>



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