



## Mercury vapour from energy saving lightbulbs no threat to public health, say scientists

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**Mercury vapours from a broken energy saving lightbulb do not pose a significant threat to public health, according to air pollution experts.**

Scientists at the Health Protection Agency have reviewed the potential health effects of mercury exposure from broken compact fluorescent lightbulbs.

They found the exposure is likely to be very small - and much lower than from other broken mercury containing products such as some types of thermometer and barometers.

Professor Virginia Murray, Consultant Medical Toxicologist, said: "Compact fluorescent lightbulbs contain a tiny amount of mercury - roughly enough to cover the tip of a ball point pen. A small proportion of this could be released into a room if the bulb is broken, but this does not pose a health risk to anyone immediately exposed.

"As a precautionary measure, the HPA advise that the room should be ventilated and the bulb cleaned up and disposed of properly."

The clean up should involve:

On hard surfaces wipe the area with a damp cloth, place that in the plastic bag and seal it.

Sticky tape (e.g. duct tape or similar) can be used to pick up small residual pieces or powder from soft furnishings and then placed in a sealed plastic bag.

The plastic bag doesn't need to be air tight, but should be reasonably sturdy. Place it in another, similar bag and seal that one as well (again, this minimises cuts from broken glass).

The public should contact the local authority for advice on where to dispose of broken or intact CFLs as they should be treated as hazardous waste.

### Notes to editors

The HPA has published a step by step guide on the disposal of CFL on its website. For more information go to [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

The mercury in CFL cannot escape if the bulb is unbroken but a small amount of mercury vapour can be released if it is broken.

Metallic mercury is virtually non-toxic if ingested. Short-term inhalation of very high levels of mercury vapour causes coughing, breathlessness and chest tightness within a few hours of exposure. Long-term inhalation of mercury vapour may cause damage to the central nervous system, the kidneys and oral cavity. There is no convincing evidence that mercury (or mercury compounds) can cause cancer in humans.

The UK Government announced at the end of 2007 an agreement with retailers and manufacturers to voluntarily phase out the sale of traditional lightbulbs by the end of 2011, in favour of Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs).

For more details please contact the CRCE press office on 01235 822745 or 01235 822876.

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