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DEP LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE CONVENIENCE OF CFL RECYCLING

Recycling Containers to be Placed in Municipal Buildings, Businesses, Community Organizations Across PA

NORRISTOWN – Compact fluorescent light bulbs can save up to 75 percent of the energy used by traditional light bulbs, said Environmental Protection Secretary Kathleen A. McGinty, but a lack of options on where to recycle the bulbs may make some consumers reluctant to adopt the increasingly popular technology.

To help spur the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs, or CFLs, and make it easier for the public to recycle the swirly tubed bulbs, DEP is providing receptacles to municipalities, small businesses and community organizations across the state hoping the experience will lead participants to continue with their own programs.

“If all of the households in Pennsylvania changed just one incandescent light bulb to an ENERGY STAR-qualified CFL, consumers could save \$25.5 million annually on household electric bills and prevent nearly 382 millions pounds of greenhouse gas emissions each year,” said McGinty. “That is the power of energy efficiency, and we need to encourage people to take advantage of that power by adopting these safe and readily available technologies as soon as possible.

Compact fluorescent light bulbs sales have increased nationwide, but some consumers are hesitant to purchase the energy efficient bulbs because they are not sure how to dispose of them properly. Pennsylvania encourages consumers to recycle CFLs whenever possible, and in order to make recycling more convenient and accessible, DEP has launched a recycling campaign in partnership with local governments across the state.

The department is partnering with 43 counties, townships, environmental groups and small businesses statewide in setting up CFL collection programs.

More than 110 containers were purchased from Pennsylvania firms AERC Recycling, based

in Allentown, and Hellertown, Northampton County-based, Bethlehem Apparatus Company. Both companies shipped the receptacles directly to the participants for use in conjunction with Earth Day and other hazardous household waste collection events.

The AERC containers will hold 100-150 bulbs, and the Bethlehem Apparatus containers will hold slightly less than 100.

Once the containers are filled, participants will ship the receptacles back to AERC or Bethlehem Apparatus for the physical recycling.

DEP invited counties, municipal governments, environmental groups and other organizations to host CFL recycling containers in publicly accessible buildings. To recycle a bulb, a consumer simply needs to hand it over to a trained employee, who slides it into the container.

McGinty said the state is working to identify other potential partners in order to make recycling a compact fluorescent light bulb as easy as it is to buy one.

“We need to work together with all the parties—government, businesses, non-profits and community service organizations—to make recycling as convenient as possible,” said McGinty. “Last month, we sent a letter to the nation’s largest retailers and other partners of the Energy Star program expressing our interest in launching a pilot program whereby consumers could return a bulb to the point of sale just as easily as they could run through the checkout line with one. It’s time to turn on the power of CFLs for reducing energy consumption and protecting our environment.”

The statewide campaign will also include an effort to increase public awareness of the economic and environmental benefits CFLs can offer. The department is making fact sheets available that outline potential savings and estimates on how much pollution can cut from power plants because less energy is required to light the compact fluorescents.

Though CFLs cost more, the energy savings pay back the higher upfront costs in as little as four months. Over its entire life cycle, each CFL can save a consumer more than \$60.

The average U.S. household has 45 light bulbs; replacing that number of 75-watt incandescent bulbs with CFLs would save more than \$150 per year. CFLs also last up to 10 times longer than traditional bulbs.

The fact sheets will also address the issue of mercury in CFLs. Small amounts of mercury are necessary components of compact fluorescent light bulbs and all types of fluorescent lights, including those that have been safely used in homes, offices and commercial and retail establishments for years. CFLs contain an average of 5 milligrams of mercury, or about the amount that would cover the tip of a ballpoint pen, or an amount 100 times less than is found in an old-style glass thermometer and one-fifth the amount in a watch battery.

For those residents in need of CFL recycling services, the department reminds residents that they can also recycle them at household hazardous waste collection events in their communities. DEP reimburses organizers 50 percent of the cost for holding collection events, where residents can safely recycle potentially hazardous wastes, such as pesticides, cleaners and rechargeable batteries.

For more information, visit www.depweb.state.pa.us, keyword: Household Hazardous Waste.

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EDITOR’S NOTE: The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has issued the following guidelines for safely cleaning up accidentally broken CFLs.

What to do if you accidentally break a bulb:

Before Cleanup: Vent the Room

- Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.
- Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.

Cleanup Steps for Hard Surfaces

- Wear disposable gloves, if available.
- Carefully scoop up glass fragments and powder using stiff paper or cardboard and place them in a glass jar with metal lid (such as a canning jar) or in a sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
- Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes and place them in the glass jar or plastic bag.
- Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

Cleanup Steps for Carpeting or Rugs

- Wear disposable gloves.
- Carefully pick up glass fragments and place them in a glass jar with metal lid or in a sealed plastic bag.
- Use sticky tape to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
- If vacuuming is needed after all visible materials are removed, vacuum the area where the bulb was broken.
- Remove the vacuum bag (or empty and wipe the canister), and put the bag or vacuum debris in a sealed plastic bag.

Disposal of Clean-up Materials

- Immediately place all cleanup materials, including gloves, outside the building in a trash container or outdoor protected area for the next normal trash.
- Wash your hands after disposing of the jars or plastic bags containing clean-up materials.

Future Cleaning of Carpeting or Rug: Vent the Room During and After Vacuuming

- For at least the next few times you vacuum, shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system and open a window prior to vacuuming.
- Keep the central heating/air conditioning system shut off and the window open for at least 15 minutes after vacuuming is completed.

For more information on CFLs, visit www.energystar.gov.

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