

Recyclers' Corner



March 2011 Issue

[Editor's Note: Recyclers' Corner is a periodic news column sponsored by Denver Recycles, a program of Denver Public Works/Solid Waste Management. It includes updates on seasonal and ongoing activities related to the City and County of Denver's recycling programs. Editors are invited to publish all or part of the column; however, we request that you run major edits by our staff to ensure accuracy of the information. Questions may be directed to Charlotte Pitt or Tom Strickland at Denver Recycles, 303-446-3557.]

Recycling CFL Bulbs – What You Need to Know

Congratulations! You are now using **Compact Fluorescent Light** bulbs (CFLs) in your home. You are saving energy and saving money on your utility bills. Now what do you do if a CFL burns out or breaks?

What to do with burned out CFLs?

Unlike standard incandescent bulbs, CFL bulbs do contain trace amounts of mercury. It is not a lot of mercury, about one-hundredth the amount of an old-style mercury thermometer; however, it is still enough to pose a danger to your health and the environment. The good news is that CFLs are 100 percent recyclable and safe when disposed of properly, and there are many free CFL recycling locations available to you.



Xcel Energy and Ace Hardware stores have partnered to recycle CFL bulbs. You may take your CFL bulbs for free recycling drop-off at any of the over one hundred **Ace Hardware** stores in Colorado. Also, **Home Depot** and **Lowes** stores offer free recycling of CFL bulbs as part of their national programs.

Recycling CFLs is also important because other materials in the bulbs get reused. The glass and metal that make up CFL bulbs can be recycled.

What to do if a CFL breaks?

According to the EPA, when a CFL bulb or any fluorescent bulb breaks in your home, some of the mercury is released as mercury vapor. The broken bulb can continue to release mercury vapor until it is cleaned up and removed from the residence. To minimize exposure to mercury vapor, EPA recommends that residents follow the cleanup and disposal steps described below.

1. Before cleanup:
 - Have people and pets leave the room.
 - Air out the room for 5-10 minutes by opening a window or door to the outdoor environment.
 - Shut off the central forced air heating/air-conditioning system, if you have one.
 - Collect materials needed to clean up broken bulb such as wet paper towels and a sealable bag or container.
2. During cleanup:
 - Be thorough in collecting broken glass and visible powder.
 - Place cleanup materials in a sealable container.
3. After cleanup:
 - Promptly place all bulb debris and cleanup materials outdoors in a trash container or protected area until materials can be disposed of properly. Avoid leaving any bulb fragments or cleanup materials indoors.
 - If practical, continue to air out the room where the bulb was broken and leave the heating/air conditioning system shut off for several hours.

****Please note:** For much more detailed cleanup instructions for various services, visit the EPA's website at epa.gov/cfl/cflcleanup.html

What about recycling other types of fluorescent bulbs?

The long, "tube like" fluorescent bulbs most often used in commercial lighting fixtures are not accepted for recycling at most hardware stores like CFL bulbs. However, Denver residents can dispose of their fluorescent tubes as part of the Denver's Household Hazardous Waste collection program. For more information on this program, please visit online at DenverGov.org/DenverRecycles.

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6 Easy Ways to Be Better Denver Recycler!

In 2010, **Denver residents recycled a record 31,300 tons** of recyclable materials through the Denver Recycles program. Also more households participated in the program than ever before, with the program surpassing 100,000 recyclers in 2010. Congratulations Denver!

Despite the continued growth of participation and awareness, there is still room for improvement and together we can recycle even more materials in 2011. Below are a few recycling tips on how you can become an even better recycler:

1. **Review the current list of accepted materials** regularly to see if there are any new items added that you have overlooked and could be recycled instead of thrown in the trash. A list of recyclable items can be found online at DenverGov.org/DenverRecycles or you can call **3-1-1** to have a "Guide to Easy Recycling" booklet mailed to you. Did you know in 2010 Denver Recycles added #5 plastic cups and tubs to the list of acceptable items?
2. **Check your trash.** Before emptying a waste basket from a bedroom or office, check to see if there are any recyclable items you can pull out and recycle instead.
3. **Make recycling a habit in every room of the house.** Recycling isn't just for the kitchen or living room. It's for every room in the house. Challenge yourself to recycle products from the bathroom, laundry room and garage as well.
4. **Keep non-acceptable items out of your recycling cart.** Items not accepted in the program can contaminate other recyclables that are collected, which results in increased recycling costs and could result in loads being rejected for recycling.
5. **Flatten and break down all boxes before putting them in your purple cart.** This will leave more room for other recyclable materials. Remember all boxes should be cut or folded down to no larger than 2 feet by 2 feet when placed in the recycling carts. Cardboard left outside your recycling cart will not be recycled.
6. **Never place plastic bags in your purple cart.** The equipment that sorts the recyclables is incredibly sophisticated and plastic bags are the one item that can get tangled around this equipment and cause damage and operating downtime.

For more information about the Denver Recycles program, please call **3-1-1** or visit us online at DenverGov.org/DenverRecycles.

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