

Management of “Green” Fluorescent Bulbs

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How to Manage Your “Green” Fluorescent Bulbs

Many bulb retailers are now offering “green” fluorescent bulbs that they claim will not be hazardous waste when disposed. These bulbs have different names, but are often referred to as “green” bulbs because they have green markings, such as a green printed monogram, green end-caps or other green indicators.

The purpose of this publication is to clarify the Department’s position on management of this waste stream.

The Department encourages the recycling, rather than disposal, of all mercury-containing bulbs, including “green” bulbs.

Are “green” bulbs hazardous waste?

“Green” bulbs may be non-hazardous, but they still contain mercury. Mercury, even at very low levels, can become air-borne and be deposited into the environment, such as lakes and other water bodies.

Businesses and institutions generating waste bulbs are responsible for determining if the bulbs are hazardous waste and for managing them properly. The following should be used to document whether

the spent bulbs are hazardous waste:

- information from the manufacturer certifying that the bulbs do not leach mercury above the toxicity characteristic regulatory limit, or
- test results from a Wisconsin-certified laboratory indicating that the waste does not exceed the regulatory limit.

It is important to have full knowledge of what is being sent to a landfill or other waste management facility.

Green fluorescent bulbs should not be disposed as a general solid waste unless the generator can document that the waste is non-hazardous using one of the methods described above. This information should be provided in writing.

Note: Even if the bulbs are non-hazardous waste, some landfills may not accept any type of mercury containing waste.

How should spent “green” bulbs be managed?

“Green” bulbs still contain mercury. Therefore, the Department encourages recycling or reclaiming, rather than disposal, of the mercury in mercury-containing bulbs. The Department recommends recycling for the following reasons:

- Persons disposing of mercury containing waste in landfills may be responsible for future contamination. Under federal Superfund laws, and Wisconsin Hazardous Substance Spills laws, individuals, business, transporters, or communities who contributed to, or caused, environmental contamination are considered potentially responsible parties, and may be liable for contamination even if

they acted in good faith and according to law at the time. Recycling is a way to reduce a waste generator’s liability.

- Reduce, Reuse, Recycle. The Department’s policy on waste management, s. 287.05, Wisconsin Statutes, encourages people to reduce waste at its source, reuse waste that can not be eliminated, and recycle waste in an environmentally safe manner. Waste disposal should be a last option.
- Mercury is toxic. Even small amounts of mercury have the potential to negatively impact the environment. Mercury is a persistent, bioaccumulative toxin, which means that it accumulates in the food chain, and does not break down in the environment.

For these reasons, the Department *strongly* recommends recycling the mercury in all spent mercury-containing bulbs.

For more information

To find a bulb recycler in your area visit the Wisconsin Recycling Markets Directory at:

- <http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/markets/>

Two useful related publications:

- *Safe Lamp and Bulb Management*
<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/publications/hazard/BulbrecyclingWA195-03.pdf>
- *Management of Wisconsin-Specific Universal Wastes*
<http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/publications/hazard/unvwaste204.pdf>

To read about all administrative codes pertaining to hazardous waste (including groundwater quality, household hazardous waste, and mercury, among many others), see:

- <http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/information/wiacssh.htm>

For a complete list of DNR hazardous waste publications, see:

- <http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/publications/>

To read about Wisconsin's hazardous waste regulatory program, including local contacts, see:

- <http://www.dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/hazard/>

For a link to Wisconsin government, including laws, legislation, and announcements, see:

- <http://www.wisconsin.gov/state/home/>

How to Reach Us

For additional information on waste management requirements and recycling options, contact the waste management staff at these DNR regional offices:

- Northeast Region, Green Bay, 920/492-5800
- Northern Region, Rhinelander, 715/365-8900
- Northern Region, Spooner, 715/635-2101
- South Central Region, Fitchburg, 608/275-3266
- Southeast Region, Milwaukee, 414/263-8500
- West Central Region, Eau Claire, 715/839-3700

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