



What to Do if a Fluorescent Light Breaks



Fluorescent lights are energy efficient and help reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to global climate change. These lights are able to accomplish this because they contain small amounts of mercury sealed within the glass tubing.

Mercury is a natural element that has many uses. However, mercury is a powerful neurotoxin and causes a variety of adverse health effects due to exposure. Those who are at most risk from mercury exposure are pregnant women and developing children.

When a fluorescent light breaks, EPA recommends the following clean-up instructions:

Before Clean-up: Air Out the Room

1. Have people and pets leave the room, and don't let anyone walk through the breakage area on their way out.
2. Open a window and leave the room for 15 minutes or more.
3. Shut off the central forced-air heating/air conditioning system, if you have one.

Clean-Up Steps for Hard Surfaces

1. Carefully scoop up glass pieces 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.
2. Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any remaining small glass fragments and powder.
3. Wipe the area clean with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place towels in the glass jar or plastic bag.
4. Do not use a vacuum or broom to clean up the broken bulb on hard surfaces.

Clean-up Steps for Carpeting or Rug

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

Clean-up Steps for Clothing, Bedding and Other Soft Materials

- If clothing or bedding materials come in direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from inside the bulb that may stick to the fabric, the clothing or bedding should be thrown away. Do not wash such clothing or bedding because mercury fragments in the clothing may contaminate the machine and/or pollute sewage.
- You can, however, wash clothing or other materials that have been exposed to the mercury vapor from a broken CFL, such as the clothing you are wearing when you cleaned up the broken CFL, as long as that clothing has not come into direct contact with the materials from the broken bulb.
- If shoes come into direct contact with broken glass or mercury-containing powder from the bulb, wipe them off with damp paper towels or disposable wet wipes. Place the towels or wipes in a glass jar or plastic bag for disposal.

Disposal of Clean-up Materials

Take the sealed plastic bag of cleanup materials to the local Household Hazardous Waste facility (HHW). If you vacuum, make sure to dispose of the bag along with the broken CFL at your local HHW.

Contact the Snohomish Health District for proper disposal in accordance with local, state and federal laws. In Snohomish County, properly collected, bagged and labeled mercury and mercury contaminated clean up materials can be disposed of at the Household Hazardous Waste facility in Everett at 3434 McDougall Avenue (425.388.6050 or www.snoco.org, then search "Haz Waste Drop Off").

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

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

Recommendation: Go to <http://www.epa.gov/mercury/spills/> to view information on health effects related to exposures to vapors from metallic mercury. For additional information on health effects, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) provides a Mercury Fact Sheet that also presents information on health effects related to exposures to vapors from metallic mercury at <http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/tfacts46.html>.