

## Dispose of Fluorescent Light Bulbs Properly

In May, 2008, an Ohio Court of Appeals determined that Wal-Mart was not responsible for the illegal disposal of fluorescent light bulbs, in part, because Wal-Mart had entered into a contractor to recycle the spent bulbs. However, when Ohio EPA inspected the recycling facility, Ohio EPA found evidence that the lamps had been unlawfully crushed and that "no recycling of any significance had taken place" at the facility. In 2005, the Ohio EPA reached an agreement with the owner of the property whereby the owner agreed to spend in excess of \$850,000 to clean-up the property.

The owner then sued Wal-Mart, as the generator of the spent fluorescent bulbs. The Court observed that the owner of the land admitted he was aware of the recycling company's lack of experience in the fluorescent bulb recycling business, was aware of some financial difficulties the recycler was experiencing. In addition, there was evidence that the owner had, on several occasions, visited the property and observed that the bulbs had simply been stockpiled, and not recycled. Therefore, the court concluded the owner was 100% liable for the clean-up.

Normally, a standard 4-foot fluorescent light bulb contains an average of 20-40 milligrams per liter of mercury, depending on the brand and the date of manufacture. These chemicals, if released, can contaminate the air, soil, surface water, and ground water and if absorbed through the skin or inhaled can accumulate in living tissue and cause severe health problems.

If your company has fluorescent bulbs, your company has two options. First, if your company already deals with chemicals that are a hazardous waste, your company may chose to treat these bulbs as a part of its hazardous waste. The second option is treat the spent bulbs as a "universal waste."

Under the "universal waste" regulations, spent fluorescent bulbs should be put back into the original container unless the lamp is broken, damaged, or leaking, in which case the bulb should be placed either into a 55-gallon steel drum or a fiberboard drum and then properly closed immediately. The outside container of each spent bulb should then be marked as, "Universal Waste Lamps" or "Waste Lamps" or "Used Lamps." This can be done on the outside package of the spent bulb. At least once a year, your company should ship these bulbs to a universal waste recycling facility for proper disposal.



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*Frank J. Reed, Jr. is Of Counsel in the Environmental Law practice group of Benesch Friedlander Coplan & Aronoff, LLP. He can be reached at (614) 223-9304 or [FReed@beneschlaw.com](mailto:FReed@beneschlaw.com).*