



Sustainable Solutions to Protect Our Environment

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Recommendations for Retail Collection of Fluorescent Lamps

Benefits of Retail Collection

Small and large retailers across the country are providing a convenient collection and recycling service to their customers. The Product Stewardship Institute surveyed 17 retail store managers in four states to collect information about the benefits of such programs and tips for ensuring their success. The store managers we spoke with generally found their recycling programs to be simple and successful. Many retailers simply cited their belief that it is the “right thing to do,” in addition to the following benefits:

- Increase foot traffic by providing yet another reason for a customer to visit the store. (While retailers have not collected hard data on this, many cited this as an anecdotal belief.)
- Generate positive attention in local media and enhance the community or environmental image of the store. This issue has received increasing attention in the media over recent months.
- Enhance your customer service image.
- Promote the sale of fluorescent lighting by alleviating customer concerns about mercury content and disposal.
- While there are new procedures to learn and information to share, recycling programs are simple to implement and provide an added service without detracting from the mission of the store.

Recommendations

✓ Safety for Employees and Customers

Fluorescent bulbs are fragile and contain mercury. If a bulb is broken, the glass poses a physical hazard and the mercury is an exposure hazard. Training to prevent and respond to breakage is relatively simple because cleanup procedures are readily available. Some stores have response kits (with respiratory protection, gloves, containers, etc.) at the ready. Minimize the chances of bulb breakage by:

- 1) requiring that sales associates take the bulb from the customer and place it in collection container
- 2) locating collection container off the sales floor
- 3) using collection containers of the appropriate size and shape for the type of lamps being collected.

The selection of a recycling company that can accept broken bulbs can also result in increased recycling. If the recycling company can recycle broken bulbs, some stores will accept broken bulbs from customers. The broken bulbs are either received from the customer in plastic zip-lock bags or placed in the bags by the store associates.

✓ Space in the Store

Locate the collection container behind a customer service desk or in a back room area like the storage closet or the shipping dock. This may be preferable to placing the collection bins on the sales floor for customer access, since this not only consumes sales floor space but may also increase the chances of a bulb breaking if customers do not place them gently in the box.

✓ Employee Training

Document and explain processes for: recording information about the bulbs collected (make, wattage, type, date collected), collecting, shipping, ordering replacement bins, handling applicable coupon rebates if offered, and proper response to broken bulbs. Keeping the training simple is a best practice that minimizes minor issues which could arise when employee turnover requires new training for the replacement workers. Include all information in the employee training manual.

✓ Prevent Customer Confusion about Materials Collected

This may be an initial concern early in the collection efforts but is overcome by effective employee training to educate customers about the reasons for the restrictions. Customers reportedly soon

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understood which materials were accepted and complied without issue. Provide customers with information about possible alternative locations that may be able to recycle the bulbs not collected at the store as well as other mercury-containing products (such as thermostats).

✓ **Set up the Necessary Internal Systems**

Develop simple systems for any internal documentation that is required and include a clear, concise summary in the employee manual or other training document. If an end-of-life fee is being charged to offset costs, this may need to be entered into the cash accounting system. Some programs may include tracking the number of lamps collected by using a hash or check mark when an employee puts a used lamp in the collection bin.

✓ **Comply with State and Federal Regulations**

Contact your State's department of environmental protection to be sure you understand and comply with all regulations associated with collecting and recycling fluorescent lamps. Be sure the recycler you use provides documentation to certify that materials collected have been recycled according to U.S. EPA and other applicable standards.

About this Document

Across the country, increasing numbers of retailers selling fluorescent lamps to consumers are collecting and recycling used lamps to prevent the release of mercury to the environment. With funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Region 8) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Product Stewardship Institute (PSI) interviewed retailers to ascertain strategies for safe, simple implementation of retail collection of fluorescent lamps. The survey instrument was developed by a multi-stakeholder workgroup of PSI's National Dialogue on Fluorescent Lighting. Respondents from California, Colorado, Maine, and Washington provided information on collection programs being implemented in hardware, "big box," grocery, and drug stores that sell fluorescent lamps.

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