

Compact fluorescent light bulbs lose sheen but still outshine alternative

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MCCLEATCHY NEWSMARRERS

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A first simple step to living greener is using compact fluorescent bulbs, you hear repeatedly. After all, they last for years, saving money and energy.

But making the switch to these bulbs isn't so easy.

"Customers complain about how they forked over \$10 apiece for CFLs a few years ago and then the bulbs didn't last as long as" the manufacturers claimed, said Clint Poteete, national sales director of Light Bulbs Etc., a worldwide lighting supplier based in Lenexa, Kan.

"The first generation of CFLs did have major problems, but they have improved and they do last."

Bob Markovich, home and yard editor of Consumer Reports magazine, agrees. The publication ranked CFLs in the May issue.

"They once had a humming noise, but they don't now," he says. "Still, like other green solutions, they're not perfect."

Recycling

CFLs contain small amounts of mercury, which means you can't just toss them in the trash as you can incandescent bulbs. Some people say you can dispose of them in sealed, doubled plastic bags. But that's not a green solution.

Recycling is the best op-

A comparison

Compact fluorescent lights versus incandescent bulbs:

Average price: \$7 vs. 50 cents
Average lifespan: 8,000 hours vs. 1,000 hours

Average electrical bill savings per CFL: \$30 over its lifetime

The next step: Light emitting diodes, or LEDs, last longer than CFLs and don't contain mercury. However, the technology still is years away from being truly mainstream. LEDs are currently used mostly as accent lighting in homes.

Source: Energy Star, Consumer Reports. Prices based on equivalent 60-watt incandescent bulbs and 15-watt CFLs.

tion. However, there aren't many recycling centers available. At some county hazardous waste collection sites, you have to pay about \$1 per bulb to recycle CFLs.

Cleanup

If a CFL breaks, you can't clean it up as you would an incandescent because of its mercury.

According to instructions from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, you should open windows and doors and leave the room for 15 minutes. Don't vacuum. On hardwood floors, wear disposable rubber gloves and use cardboard or stiff paper to scoop up debris. Then clean the area with a damp paper towel. For rugs, use sticky tape to pick up any

compact fluorescent bulb fragments and powder. Place the debris and cleanup materials in sealed, doubled plastic bags. Recycle if possible.

After vacuuming the spot, remove the vacuum bag and seal it. Put that bag in a plastic bag, seal it and throw it away. Wash hands.

Color

The bluish light of some CFLs makes you feel like you're in a science lab. For more natural lighting, choose bulbs that are 2,700 to 3,000 Kelvin, says Bob Black, owner of Light Bulbs Etc. They mimic the warm, yellowish light of incandescent bulbs.

Warm-up time

CFLs can take more than a minute to achieve full brightness. Interior designer Barbara Bishop of Kansas City uses a CFL in her dressing room. While the light is warming up, she makes her bed. "The light is usually ready for me by then," she says.

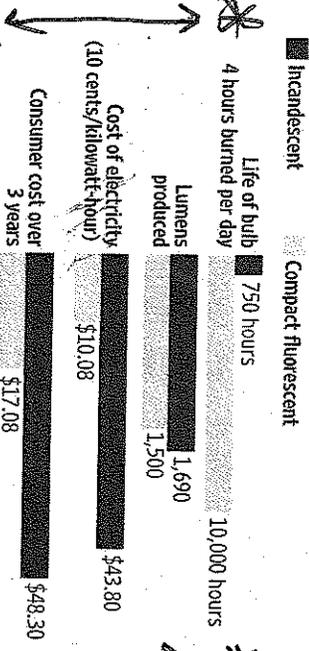
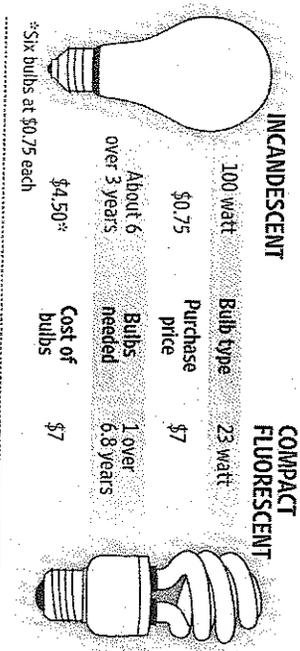
Because of the warm-up time, CFLs are not recommended for safety applications such as stairways, or security lighting such as motion sensors. However, CFLs are good for front porch lights that stay on all the time.

Quality varies

Brands matter with CFLs. Markovich says. In Consumer Reports' recent rankings of Energy Star-qualified CFLs,

Battle of the bulbs

While compact fluorescent light bulbs have had problems, they save energy and money.



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Compact fluorescents reduce electricity consumption by 80%, which reduces greenhouse emissions from burning fossil fuels at power plants

Source: Consumer Manual
McCleatchy-Tribu

the Feit Ecobulb ESL18T (\$2.25) failed much earlier than others, at 3,300 to 3,900 hours. That's much less than the average 8,000 hours it claims on the package. However, that Feit CFL still lasts three times longer than the average incandescent, saving about \$13 during a 3,300-hour bulb life.

Getting dimmer

CFLs can be dimmed using special dimmable bulbs that cost three to four times more than the average CFL.

Even then, they don't dim as consistently as incandescent bulbs, Black says. And you might need to have an electrician update your dimmer system.