FYI - March 2008

Talking Trash: A bright idea

Whenever you replace an incandescent light bulb with a compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL) you are helping to reduce global warming, by reducing energy use and mercury pollution.

CFLs offer the same performance, versatility, and intensity as the old style incandescent light bulbs, but use 50 to 80 percent less energy. And they usually last 10 times longer. (Another plus: they do not generate heat.) Today's CLFs are powered by electronic ballasts, so that the bulbs can reach full intensity fairly rapidly.

The energy output of CLFs is listed on the packaging in lumens, a measure of light intensity, whereas the packaging of incandescent bulbs specifies only the power output, in watts. So, for example, a 60-watt incandescent bulb and a 15-watt CFL each produce about 800 lumens. (See Energy Star's Light Output Equivalency chart at www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=cfls.pr_cfls.)

Coal generates more than half the electricity in the US, and is the source of most of our mercury emissions. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, a coal-fired power plant typically emits 15 milligrams of mercury for each incandescent light bulb running six hours per day for five years, but only 3.2 milligrams of mercury for an incandescent bulb running the same amount of time.

CLFs, which are manufactured in many shapes, sizes, and for different size sockets, can accommodate three-way, dimmable, and outdoor fixtures, and can be used with motion detectors. They produce light in various shades of white, with color temperatures ranging from soft yellows (2700 K), to brilliant "daylight" blues (5000 K),

Frequent on/off cycling reduces the useful life of any light bulb; therefore, in order to ensure significant energy savings quickly, start replacing your old incandescent bulbs in fixtures where lights stay on for long periods of time.

CLFs contain a small amount of mercury (about 5 mg) and must be recycled (at Rumford Ave) after their useful life; proper disposal allows the mercury to be recaptured. www.lamprecycle.org.