

Clean Lighting: How Maryland Can Protect Health and Lower Energy Bills by Phasing Out Fluorescent Light Bulbs

Fluorescent lights are a common sight in offices, garages, and basements—but they contain toxic mercury and use far more energy than newer alternatives. By phasing out fluorescents in favor of efficient LED bulbs, Maryland can avert a needless health risk, save families and business money on utility bills, and curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Fluorescent lighting was once the preferred option for many uses, but not anymore. LED light bulbs—readily available as replacements for fluorescents in all needed shapes and sizes—do not contain the toxic mercury that fluorescent bulbs do. LED's cut energy use in half compared to fluorescents, last about twice as long, and typically cost far less to purchase and operate over their lifetime.

In 2022, Vermont and California phased out the sale of most fluorescent bulbs. As other states move to eliminate fluorescents, Maryland risks becoming a dumping ground for inefficient, mercury-containing bulbs that suppliers cannot sell elsewhere.

Fluorescent light bulbs covered by this bill are not manufactured in Maryland, in fact none are even made in the USA. Maryland lawmakers can take prompt action to phase out sales of the most common fluorescent bulbs by 2025.

Reduce the threat of mercury exposure

All fluorescent bulbs contain mercury, a potent neurotoxin that [threatens human health](#) and the environment. The World Health Organization counts mercury among the top 10 most dangerous chemicals impacting public health.

When fluorescent bulbs are accidentally broken—whether in homes, businesses, or the waste management system—they present a health hazard to those nearby. And when fluorescent bulbs are not disposed of properly—as happens with an estimated 75% of bulbs—mercury leaches from landfills and eventually contaminates rivers, lakes, and oceans and the fish and shellfish within them.

LEDs, which are mercury-free, are a much safer option. Technological advancements in recent years have made them readily available and cost effective.

By transitioning from the most common fluorescent bulbs to LEDs, Maryland could avoid

18.3 pounds

of mercury waste, enough to contaminate 912 million gallons of water.

Save money on energy bills

By 2030, Maryland households and businesses would save more than **\$87 million annually** on their utility bills.

Fluorescent bulbs are [no longer the most affordable lighting option](#). LEDs are more efficient and cost less to operate, more than paying back their slightly higher upfront costs—which continue to drop each year—through lower electric bills. A typical school could see more than \$5,000 in annual utility bill savings if all its fluorescent bulbs were replaced with LEDs.

LEDs also last about twice as long as fluorescents, so they need to be replaced less often. And because LEDs do not contain mercury, a hazardous waste, they can be disposed of more easily and cheaply than fluorescents when the time comes.

Avert needless greenhouse gas emissions

LEDs use approximately half the electricity as fluorescent bulbs to produce the same amount of light. As a result, accelerating the transition to LEDs can reduce planet-warming emissions from power plants and help prevent the worst effects of climate change.

By 2050, Maryland could avoid the release of **2.1 million metric tons** of carbon dioxide per year, the equivalent of 452,000 gasoline-powered passenger vehicles driven for one year.

Maryland lawmakers can phase out fluorescents



Maryland has already phased out the sales of thermometers and thermostats that contain mercury because of toxicity.

Lawmakers can continue this effort to protect Maryland from mercury pollution by phasing out fluorescent light bulbs and transitioning to LEDs.

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