

Bulb recycling program debuts

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FRIDAY - APRIL 22, 2011 - NAPA, CA - The City of Napa, along with Leadership Napa Valley, Napa County, PG&E and participating retailers, gathered at Central Valley Builders Supply in Napa on Friday to announce the launch of a compact fluorescent light bulbs recycling program with collection boxes at various locations in the valley. J.L. Sousa/Register



Most people have gotten the message about using compact fluorescent light bulbs or CFLs. According to the Department of Energy, CFLs use 75 percent less energy than traditional incandescent light bulbs and last 15 times as long.

But where do we put fluorescent bulbs — or lamps, as they are known — when they burn out?

Not in the trash and not in your blue recycling bin, as it turns out. Fluorescent lamps are banned from California landfills because they contain mercury.

Until now, residents have been able to drive to the Napa Recycling and Waste Services' transfer station on Devlin Road in American Canyon to drop off their CFLs in special containers, but that can be inconvenient for some folks, said Kevin Miller, recycling manager for the city of Napa.

Now, the city has another option for consumers. On Friday, the city unveiled a fluorescent lamp recycling program called Lighting Efficiency and Safe Stewardship or LESS.

Fluorescent lamp recycling containers have been placed in four business locations in the city, thanks to its partnership with Leadership Napa Valley, the county, Pacific Gas & Electric, the federal government and Sustainable Napa County. Residents dispose burned out lamps inside specially marked green bags and place them inside a LESS receptacle in a free service to consumers.

“This is just a start,” said City Councilman Mark van Gorder. “All it takes is one to two collection (sites) to get this rolling.”

Current recycling sites for the LESS program are Central Valley Builders Supply, Orchard Supply Hardware, Napa Electric and Office Depot.

Peter Weber, customer service representative with Central Valley Builders Supply, said that before the LESS program, the store accepted old CFLs but “it was messy,” he said.

There was no organized method for collection, and broken bulbs could be hazardous, officials said. Someone would have to drive the lamps down to the Napa Recycling location in American Canyon.

With the LESS program, Weber simply puts the lamps in bags, seals them in a black plastic bucket and the entire container is shipped to the appropriate recycling facility.

“This is clean and efficient,” he said.

The LESS program is paid for by the city, solid waste rate payers, a federal grant, and PG&E rate payers, according to a news release.

This program should save money, organizers said. Napa County spends about \$24,000 per year recycling fluorescent lamps and the estimated collection rate is less than 2 percent of what is available to be recycled, according to the release. When disposed of correctly, CFLs are 99 percent recyclable.

Fluorescent tubes up to four feet long, like those used in kitchens, can also be recycled, Weber noted. Thermometers that contain mercury should not be placed in the LESS containers.

Customers who want to find out more about the LESS program can visit the Leadership Napa Valley booth during Earth Day at Veterans Memorial Park on Saturday. The group will be offering a lamp exchange during the event.