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MEMORANDUM

TO: Local Health Department Administrators
Local Environmental Health Professionals

FROM: Gary Flentge, Chief
Division of Environmental Health

DATE: January 30, 2008

SUBJECT: Compact Fluorescent Light Information

With the increased use of compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) in homes, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) provides the following information that may be useful to you.

CFLs contain about 5 milligrams of mercury, which is about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen. For comparison purposes, a mercury-based fever thermometer contains about 500 milligrams of mercury. IDPH considers a broken fever thermometer a small mercury spill, and provides instructions for cleaning such spills in our fact sheet available at: <http://www.idph.state.il.us/envhealth/factsheets/mercuryspills.htm>

The amount of mercury vapor that is released from one broken CFL poses little risk; however, it is best to reduce exposure to mercury. Residents can reduce exposure by following these recommendations for clean up of a broken CFL:

- Windows and outside doors in the area of the spill should be opened to ventilate the area.
- **Do NOT use a vacuum cleaner to clean up broken CFL.** A vacuum cleaner will rapidly aerosolize the mercury droplets and the resultant mercury vapors can then be inhaled. In addition, the vacuum cleaner may become contaminated with mercury.
- **For CFL breakage on a hard surface,** you should collect the pieces as you would any broken glass using a broom, two pieces of cardboard or stiff paper. Place the broken pieces in a sealed plastic bag or container. A damp disposable rag or paper towel should be used to do a final wipe of the area. Place the rag or paper towel in the plastic bag or container with the broken bulb pieces and dispose of it outside in your household trash.
- **For CFL breakage on a carpet** or other soft surface like upholstered furniture, carefully collect and bag the broken parts as described above. Dab the area with the sticky side of duct tape or packaging tape to pick up any powder residue, mercury droplets, and small pieces of glass. Place the tape in the plastic bag or container and dispose of it outside in your household trash. To prevent cuts from any remaining glass, protect the area from contact for two weeks until any remaining mercury has evaporated away and the carpeting can be vacuumed safely.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency suggests persons take used CFLs to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection location rather than disposing of them in household waste:

<http://www.epa.state.il.us/land/hazardous-waste/household-haz-waste>