

Office of Solid Waste



# Environmental Fact Sheet

## Options Proposed for Managing Discarded Fluorescent and Other Lights that Contain Mercury

### Background

Mercury-containing lamps include fluorescent, high-pressure sodium, mercury vapor, and metal halide lamps. Fluorescent and high intensity discharge (HID) lamps are energy efficient and consume less electricity, reducing the generation of pollution from utility plants. However, these lamps generally are considered hazardous waste under Subtitle C of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) because of their mercury content. Therefore, fluorescent and other mercury-containing lamps must be disposed of as hazardous waste (unless they are generated by households or conditionally exempt small quantity generators).

Many existing and planned energy conservation programs encourage the installation of energy efficient lighting systems, including the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) voluntary energy conservation program, *Green Lights*. Fluorescent bulbs are the most commonly used energy efficient lights, with approximately one billion in use throughout the U.S. About half—or 500 million—of these lamps are disposed of by large-scale facilities, both public and private.

Upgrading and maintaining energy efficient lighting systems often means that businesses replace all of their lamps at once. As a result, some businesses become hazardous waste generators of mercury-containing lamps when they normally are exempt from Subtitle C regulation.

### Action

This proposal contains two options for managing spent mercury-containing lights (such as, fluorescent bulbs and HID lamps).

- Option one would exclude mercury-containing lamps from regulation as hazardous waste if they are disposed of in municipal solid waste landfills (MSWLFs) that are registered, permitted, or licensed by states with EPA approved MSWLF permitting programs, or in state registered, permitted, or licensed

mercury-reclamation facilities. Under this option, incineration of lamps in municipal waste combustors would be prohibited.

- Option two would add mercury-containing lamps to the proposed universal waste system for certain widely generated hazardous wastes (primarily nickel-cadmium batteries and cancelled pesticides). This option would allow generators to ship their lamps without a hazardous waste manifest and store lamps for a longer period of time.

EPA is considering these two options for the management of spent mercury-containing lamps based on data which indicate that these lamps may be safely managed outside of the RCRA hazardous waste system or within a reduced regulatory structure under it.

## **Contact**

For more information or to order a copy of the *Federal Register* notice, contact the RCRA Hotline, Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. EST. The national, toll-free number is (800) 424-9346; TDD (800) 553-7672 (hearing impaired); in Washington, D.C., the number is (703) 412-9810, TDD (703) 412-3323.

Copies of documents relevant to this action may be obtained by writing: RCRA Information Center (RIC), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Solid Waste (5305), 401 M Street SW, Washington, D.C. 20460.