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At lower price, special light bulbs a no-brainer

Dear Jim: The price of compact fluorescent bulbs has come down and I am ready to try them. Do they really save as much as it advertised? Which ones provide the best light quality and how do I dispose of old ones?

By: **James Dulley**, INFORUM

Editor's Note: James Dulley's column, which appeared weekly in our newspaper for many years, will now appear monthly. Dulley started writing his column in 1982. He is reducing the frequency of his column, which is syndicated in several hundred newspapers, to monthly to give him time to pursue other related activities. He plans to teach energy conservation seminars for homeowners and work on a home energy/money-saving television show.

Dear Jim: The price of compact fluorescent bulbs has come down and I am ready to try them. Do they really save as much as it advertised? Which ones provide the best light quality and how do I dispose of old ones? – Mike J.

Dear Mike: Compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) do save as much electricity, and therefore money on your utility bills, as advertised.

I use CFLs in nearly every lighting fixture in my own home. In the typical home, lighting with standard incandescent bulb accounts for about 20 percent of your energy usage.

Not too many years ago, the cost of a CFL was about \$20. Even at that high price, using them made economic sense. Now with the cost of only a couple of dollars or less, switching to CFLs is a no-brainer. Along with the lower cost, the quality of the light from CFL's has improved. I actually prefer the light quality to incandescent bulbs.

A CFL uses about one-quarter as much electricity as an incandescent bulb to produce the same amount of light. Keep in mind, wattage of any light bulb refers to how much electricity it uses, not how much light it produces. The light output is measured in lumens and should be listed on the packaging. CFLs also last about 10 times longer than incandescent bulbs.

Most CFLs contain about 4.0 mg (milligrams) of mercury, and some new designs have only 1.5 mg. The majority of mercury released into the air is from burning coal to produce electricity. Using a 13-watt CFL instead of a 60-watt incandescent bulb saves enough electricity over its life to reduce mercury emission from burning coal in the electric power plant by

4.5 mg.

Even considering the above fact, when a CFL needs to be replaced, it is wise to dispose of it properly so the mercury is not released. Contact your local waste collection service for a CFL dropoff location. Also, visit these Web sites for more disposal information: www.earth911.org and www.epa.gov/epawaste/hazard/wastetypes/universal/lamps/index.htm.

The quality of the light from a light bulb is called its CRI (color rendition index). This refers to how closely colors of objects under the artificial light match their appearance under natural sunlight. A CRI of 100 means it matches the sun. Compared to natural sunlight, the light quality of typical incandescent bulbs is a yellowish color.

We have become used to this yellowish light, so most of the CFLs are designed to produce the same type of light. This may be a CRI in the 84 range. Many of the newer CFLs have a CRI above 90 for more true colors, and in my opinion, a more pleasant light. As I have gotten older and my eyesight has gotten worse, I find it easier to read under this high-CRI light. These are often called "full-spectrum" or "daylight" CFL's.

The following companies offer CFL's: American Environmental Products,

(800) 339-9572, www.sunalite.com; Full Spectrum Solutions, (888) 574-7014, www.fullspectrumolutions.com; Maxlite, (800) 555-5629, www.maxlite.com; Ott-Lite Technology, (800) 842-8848, www.ott-lite.com; and Lumiram, (800) 354-1044, www.lumiram.com.

Dear Jim: I think my fireplace could benefit from installing glass doors. How are glass doors installed on a masonry fireplace? Is this something I can do myself or do I need to have a licensed expert do it? – Celeste P.

Dear Celeste: An open masonry fireplace almost always loses more heat than it produces, so you should definitely install glass doors. Get good-quality ones that seal well and allow you to adjust and control the inlet air.

Most glass fireplace doors are mounted to the brick or stone around the fireplace opening. It is not a difficult job to do yourself, and it does not require a licensed expert. You will need special drill bits for the masonry.

Send inquiries to James Dulley, The Forum of Fargo-Moorhead, 6906 Royalgreen Drive, Cincinnati, OH 45244, or visit www.dulley.com

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