



D E T R O I T R I V E R
C A N A D I A N
C L E A N U P

FLUORESCENT LIGHT BULBS

FACTS FOR BUSINESSES



Mercury is a serious concern in the Detroit River ecosystem. Sixty-seven percent of fish consumption advisories in the Detroit River - St. Clair River corridor are a result of elevated mercury levels. Some of the mercury in the Detroit River has been there for many years, but mercury continues to enter the ecosystem as a result of emissions from fossil fuel burning activities and releases from the breakage or improper disposal of items containing mercury.

Mercury can be found in some very common products, including tube and compact fluorescent light bulbs. The typical four foot fluorescent light tube contains between 10 and 40 milligrams of mercury. Although that may not sound like a lot, millions of fluorescent tubes are disposed of annually. Even in minute quantities, mercury can be harmful to the health of people and wildlife. If disposed of with regular garbage, fluorescent tubes can break or corrode in landfills, allowing mercury to leach into ground or surface water. Broken tubes in workplaces are a health and safety concern because of the mercury that escapes when tubes are broken.

There are currently no alternatives to using mercury in fluorescent light bulbs, although manufacturers have reduced the amounts of mercury required by about seventy-five percent in recent years. The environmental impact of fluorescent bulbs is a complicated issue. They reduce energy use when compared to incandescent bulbs, and therefore reduce the amount of mercury that is emitted by coal-fired power plants. However, if they are not disposed of properly, the mercury within them can contaminate the environment.

