

## **EPA Settlement with LIRR Sheds Light on Need for Proper Disposal of Fluorescent Bulbs**

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(New York, N.Y.) Most Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) commuters don't give the proper disposal or recycling of the fluorescent lights over their heads a second thought as they ride in and out of Manhattan. However, this issue is at the heart of the recent resolution of a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) complaint against the LIRR, which the railroad settled by paying a financial penalty of \$43,875.

EPA inspected the Hillside Maintenance Facility in Hollis, New York last year and based on that inspection and other information received from LIRR, found violations in disposing of fluorescent light bulbs as regular garbage at three facilities. In addition to the Hillside facility, Richmond Hill Sheridan Shop in Richmond Hill, NY and West Side Storage Yard in New York City were identified. While fluorescent bulbs may seem harmless, they contain mercury and can be harmful to people and the environment if improperly discarded. The LIRR estimates that it generated nearly 260,000 spent fluorescent light bulbs from 2003 to 2005. In July 2005, the railroad determined its spent bulbs are wastes that needed special handling in accordance with EPA rules. The LIRR immediately put a program into place to recycle and properly manage its spent bulbs. The LIRR is now in compliance with all EPA rules on the proper handling of spent fluorescent bulbs.

"Fluorescent lights are super efficient -- up to 80% more than incandescent bulbs -- which is great for the environment, but they do have to be handled properly once they burn out," said EPA Regional Administrator, Alan J. Steinberg. "Most people don't realize that every time they toss a fluorescent bulb into the regular trash, they are releasing mercury into the environment. Though these bulbs only contain a very small amount of mercury, it can add up fast. The LIRR settled this matter quickly and is setting a good example for others by recycling these items."

Currently available recycling systems can capture up to 99% of the mercury in fluorescent bulbs and the mercury can be reused in new bulbs. Other types of light bulbs, including high-intensity discharge (HID), neon, mercury vapor, high pressure sodium, compact fluorescent, and metal halide lamps can also contain mercury, lead, and cadmium.

While the disposal of certain low mercury and green tip fluorescent bulbs are not covered by EPA rules, Agency regulations require that non-green tip spent mercury and other toxic metal-containing bulbs from business, industry and government be handled as hazardous waste or under the simpler universal waste rules to prevent the release of mercury and other toxins into the environment. The universal waste regulations streamline collection requirements for certain hazardous wastes in the following categories: batteries, pesticides, mercury-containing equipment (e.g., thermostats) and lamps (e.g., fluorescent bulbs). While EPA recommends that even green tip spent bulbs be recycled because they do contain less but some mercury, some states have stricter requirements and may require that even green tip spent bulbs be handled as a hazardous waste.

Once it's released into the environment, mercury will repeatedly cycle through the land, water and air. When airborne, it can be deposited on soil and water bodies, settle in sediments and, ultimately, be consumed by and stored in the fat reserves of living organisms. An unfortunate outcome of this problem is the prevalence of fish advisories resulting from mercury contamination.

For more information on the proper disposal of mercury and other toxic metal-containing bulbs in New York State, members of the public and businesses should contact Anthony Martin, Department of Environmental Conservation, at

(518) 402-8633, [Ajmartin@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:Ajmartin@gw.dec.state.ny.us), or visit <http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/285.html>.

For more information about the federal rules for the proper disposal of mercury and other toxic metal-containing bulbs visit: <http://www.epa.gov/region02/waste/spent-lamp.pdf>.