

## Recycling recaptures the mercury in fluorescent bulbs

Ann Arbor is nationally recognized as a leader in recycling, a fact that will be celebrated on Thursday November 10<sup>th</sup>, the 3rd annual Washtenaw County Recycles Day. The celebration will be held at Leopold Brothers Brewery, at 523 S. Main St., from 5 to 8 p.m. It is free, open to the public, and will include complimentary food, raffle prizes and educational displays.

The event will acknowledge the accomplishments of Washtenaw County's Waste Knot Partners. Ann Arbor's 52% residential recycling and composting rate is great, but we still throw out a lot that we shouldn't. Washtenaw County has developed the Waste Knot Program to help businesses to reduce unnecessary and/or hazardous waste. Our almost 200 Waste Knot partners receive free technical assistance and recycling service discounts that help them to save money while protecting the environment.

Recycling is worth celebrating, not only because it conserves landfill space and scarce resources, but because it keeps hazardous materials from entering our environment. Take, for instance, fluorescent light bulbs...

Replacing incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents is the right thing to do because they last a lot longer and use about 75% less electricity, which equals less fossil fuel burned and pollution created. But fluorescent bulbs contain mercury, and should NOT be landfilled or incinerated due to potential release of the mercury into the environment.

Seven states have banned fluorescent bulbs from their landfills. Although Michigan isn't one of them, our state's Department of Environmental Quality does recommend that all fluorescent bulbs be recycled, even the "green" or "low-mercury" bulbs (they still contain mercury).

For \$1 a bulb (or \$10 a boxed dozen), fluorescent bulbs can be taken for recycling to the Drop-off Station on Ellsworth Road—open Monday through Saturday, from 9 to 5 (734-971-7400). The Washtenaw County Household Hazardous Waste Collection Center on Zeeb Road (734-222-6865) is open every Saturday through December 3<sup>rd</sup> from 9 to noon, and accepts the bulbs for free from county residents.

Businesses and institutions should contact the fluorescent bulb recycling companies that are listed in the "Trash-to-Treasure Guide" which is online at [recycle.ewashtenaw.org](http://recycle.ewashtenaw.org). Or they might consider buying from a company that has a "take back" program (e.g. [www.bulb.com](http://www.bulb.com)).

Always store your bulbs safely to avoid breakage—their original packing works great, or at least tape them together to ease handling. Broken bulbs are a hazard because the mercury in them—in both vapor and powder form—escapes into the environment. If a fluorescent bulb breaks, ventilate the room, and put the pieces in a closed container to prevent the powder from dispersing.

When fluorescent bulbs are recycled, the mercury in them is captured, cleaned, and sold for reuse, instead of going into our air, our water, our fish, and our bodies. Recycling them may be a bother, but it is an effort worth celebrating!

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