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Energy-Efficient bulbs to be given away

(5,000 bulbs will save \$235, 000 in energy costs)

By [Muskegon Chronicle staff](#) - Jordan Travis

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WEST MICHIGAN — A regional environmental group hopes a light goes on this spring for Muskegon-area residents — in more ways than one.

The [West Michigan Environmental Action Council](#) will give out 5,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs to local residents in a campaign to raise awareness of the energy-efficient bulbs and how to recycle them.

“We wanted to demonstrate to lakeshore communities that energy conservation is important,” said Rachel Hood, the group’s executive director. “We want to show that these bulbs are safe to use, and do bring economic savings.”

Putting 5,000 such light bulbs into use saves \$235,000 in energy costs and prevents the release of 3.6 million pounds of carbon dioxide over the lifetime of the bulbs, Hood said. She said each bulb can save \$20 to \$30 per year in energy costs.

The bulbs will be distributed door-to-door in various neighborhoods and at locations such as churches and food pantries during March and April, said Ann Erhardt, the project coordinator.

Areas targeted for the bulb giveaways include Muskegon’s Nelson, Nims and McLaughlin neighborhoods, Muskegon Heights and Roosevelt Park.

WMEAC gave away bulbs in Holland and Grand Haven in 2008 when the program started. The light bulbs are purchased from

Muskegon-based Earthtronics Inc. with a grant from the Michigan Public Service Commission.

DISPOSAL LOCATIONS

Where compact fluorescent light bulbs can be safely disposed of in the Muskegon area.

- Home Depot, 2699 Henry, Roosevelt Park, 231-755-0440.
- Public Health-Muskegon County, Health Education, 209 E. Apple, Muskegon, 231-724-1249.
- Household Hazardous Waste Collection Program, Muskegon County Department of Public Works, 1300 Keating, Muskegon, 231-724-6001.



Handout

The group is working to ensure that residents of the communities it visits have enough options to recycle or dispose of the old compact fluorescent bulbs, because they contain a small amount of mercury.

"We don't want to throw mercury into landfills," Hood said.

Erhardt said a work group would be created in Muskegon to discuss recycling fluorescent lights. The work group, she said, will get local businesses and city officials thinking about improving recycling as a whole. While Bob McCann, spokesman for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment, said he didn't want to downplay the toxic metals' presence in the bulbs, he thinks the benefits outweigh the risks.

McCann said the amount of mercury is too small to be a major concern.

A compact fluorescent bulb has an average of 4 milligrams of mercury; A thermometer, by comparison, has 500 milligrams, he said.

The state supports the recycling of compact fluorescent bulbs, McCann said. But if they ultimately end up in a landfill, it's not going to cause significant problems, he said.

Furthermore, by reducing the use of coal-fired power plants, fluorescent lights result in less mercury escaping into the environment.

Hood said certain precautions should be taken if a fluorescent bulb breaks indoors. The room should be aired out for 15 minutes, and the glass should be cleaned up with something that can be thrown away. A vacuum cleaner should never be used, she said, because it would only disperse mercury even further.

Regardless, she said that mercury exposure is unlikely to occur if a compact fluorescent bulb breaks.

The Grand Rapids-based WMEAC was founded in 1968. It has worked on a variety of environmental concerns over the decades, including the fight against the pesticide DDT and in favor of Michigan's bottle and can deposit law.

Recent work includes fighting to ban slant drilling for oil and natural gas under the Great Lakes and promoting rain gardens as a way to curb storm water pollution.