



**King County**

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**Local Hazardous Waste  
Management Program  
In King County, Washington**

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## **King County applauds bill to create statewide program to take back fluorescent bulbs and tubes**

**Toxic mercury requires safe recycling of popular, highly efficient lamps**

The Washington State Legislature passed a bill March 6, now awaiting signature from Governor Christine Gregoire that requires companies that manufacture lighting products such as compact fluorescent lights (CFLs) and tubes that contain the poisonous ingredient mercury to finance a convenient statewide recycling program for residents.

King County and the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program (LHWMP) have been actively supporting the state's efforts to establish a no-charge, statewide recycling program for mercury-containing lighting, and that effort has paid off.

"This new statewide take-back program will help protect people and safeguard the environment, while providing consumers with convenient recycling locations," said Kevin Kiernan, director of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks' Solid Waste Division.

It's no surprise that compact fluorescent lamps are growing in popularity with the public. Unlike traditional incandescent bulbs, CFLs last for years and use roughly 75 percent less energy, providing a significant and long-term cost saving.

The legislation, ESSB 5543, was also supported by Waste Management, which provides waste hauling and recycling services to some residents of King County.

"With this new statewide program we look forward to expanding our collection and recycling services for energy-efficient CFLs that are tailored to the needs of households and small businesses," said Kent Stoddard, Vice President of Public Affairs for Waste Management.

The recycling program for CFL bulbs and linear tubes is coming along at just the right time: In 2012, incandescent bulbs will begin to be phased off the market due to federal energy efficiency requirements, leaving CFLs, linear tubes and LED lamps as the primary choices for consumers.

While the amount of mercury in each CFL is relatively small, millions of lights are sold in Washington each year making the health hazard that mercury poses quite large. The producer-financed recycling system will begin in 2013 with no-cost collection service provided in every county of the state.

When enacted, the law will be similar to the Electronics Product Recycling Law which created the successful "E-Cycle Washington" program for TVs, computers and monitors. E-Cycle collected 38 million pounds of TVs, computers and monitors across the state in its first year of operation in 2009.

Mercury harms the brain, liver and kidneys and causes developmental disorders in children. It persists in the environment and bio-accumulates in the food web. If thrown in the trash, fluorescent lights can break and expose people and the environment to harmful mercury vapor.

Currently only about 2 percent of household lights containing mercury are being recycled, and statewide, recycling rates for mercury-containing lights from all sources – including businesses – are at about 30 percent. The vast majority of the mercury is likely ending up in the waste stream, where its release into the air, water and soil are all possible.

State Sen. Craig Pridemore (D-Vancouver) and State Rep. Sam Hunt (D-Olympia) were prime sponsors of the mercury-containing lighting product stewardship bills. ESSB 5543 passed with bipartisan support.

The Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County led a coalition of local governments and environmental organizations - primarily the Northwest Energy Coalition and Washington Citizens for Resource Conservation - and worked with Waste Management to pass the bill. These legislative activities were an extension of LHWMP's work to create the Take-It-Back Network of retail drop-sites for recycling fluorescent lighting.

More information on LHWMP is available at <http://www.lhwmp.org/home/>.

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