



Northern Virginia Regional Commission

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Know Your Toxics Education Campaign Coordinated by NVRC

With the upcoming switch to digital television, many residents are looking for information on how to dispose of their old TVs. Fluorescent light bulbs, a common fixture in most office buildings, schools, businesses and government buildings, are popular for their energy efficiency but also contain mercury, a highly toxic substance. Rechargeable batteries, found in more and more cordless electronic devices, also contain highly toxic chemicals and are often disposed of in the trash. The improper storage and disposal of fluorescent bulbs and rechargeable batteries into the trash contaminates the environment, risks human health, and violates the law.

In its commitment to protect the environment, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC), and its member governments, manages the *KnowToxics* campaign www.knowtoxics.com to publicize the risk of improper disposal and to provide information about the safe disposal of fluorescent lighting and rechargeable batteries as well as TVs and other electronics. While the campaign was initially directed at businesses, property managers, building managers, waste haulers, trash collectors, and others, a new section has been added for residents.

Few businesses know of their responsibility and liability under federal law. Access to proper disposal of toxic substances can be confusing. As the second largest technology corridor in the nation, Northern Virginia faces an ever expanding challenge to keep toxics out of the waste stream and to protect the quality of the environment. Improperly stored or disposed of mercury, PCBs and other toxic materials could lead to contamination of the workplace and the environment. It is estimated that approximately 90 percent of fluorescent lighting and ballasts are disposed of improperly.

Federal and state laws and regulations require the proper management and disposal of hazardous wastes generated by businesses and institutions. Businesses that properly manage fluorescent bulbs are eligible for reduced environmental regulatory requirements and environmental liability that may be associated with the improper disposal of hazardous wastes.

When fluorescent bulbs are thrown in the trash, mercury can enter the environment and affect both wildlife and humans. The mercury dust and vapors from a single broken fluorescent bulb is hazardous to human health and can contaminate as

much as 7,000 gallons of water. To protect themselves and the workplace from mercury, special procedures need to be followed when cleaning up a broken bulb.

The ***KnowToxics*** campaign encourages businesses to develop a strategy to manage disposal of fluorescent bulbs and promotes the recycling of rechargeable batteries. More information can be found at www.knowtoxics.com. For more information about the ***KnowToxics*** campaign contact NVRC's Senior Environmental Planner Debbie Spiliotopoulos at dspilio@novaregion.org or 703.642.4631.

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