



Department of Environmental Protection

One Winter Street Boston, MA 02108 • 617-292-5500

Guidance: Cleaning Up Broken Fluorescent Light Bulbs

The following guidance provides instructions for businesses and institutions for cleaning up a broken fluorescent light bulb on hard surfaces. Following these steps will protect you and others from getting cut by broken glass, and from potential exposure to mercury that is released when a bulb breaks. If you break a bulb on a carpeted surface, please see **Cleanup Procedures for Carpeted Surfaces** below.

Materials You Will Need

- String, tape or other material to delineate the spill area
- Disposable gloves
- Index cards or other stiff paper
- The smallest possible sealable container that the broken bulb will fit in. A glass with a metal screw-on lid or a rigid plastic container with a tight-fitting lid, such as a lidded five-gallon pail, are preferable. (Please note that most mercury recycling companies will provide empty lidded five-gallon plastic containers for transporting mercury waste materials.)
- Sticky tape, such as duct tape
- Damp paper towel or wet wipe

Cleanup Procedures for Hard Surfaces

DO NOT USE A VACUUM OR BROOM TO CLEAN UP A BROKEN BULB.

1. Cordon off the area where breakage occurred so that nobody steps in broken glass, phosphor powder or mercury. This should be done as soon as possible.
2. If there is a window or door that opens to the outside near the broken bulb, open it to ventilate the area and wait about 15 minutes. If the bulb broke in an inside area, such as a hallway or retail store aisle where there is no window or door to the outside, or outside the building, do not wait to clean up.
3. Wearing disposable gloves, use stiff paper to carefully push the glass and powder to a central point where you can scoop it up, being careful not to get it on your clothing. Place the collected fragments into the container. If you need to further break the glass to fit it into the container, do this outside, being careful not to cut yourself.
4. Use sticky tape, such as duct tape, to pick up any visible glass shards, powder or mercury and place it in the container. Then, using wet wipes or moist paper towels, wipe the area thoroughly. Place used towels and disposable gloves into the container and close it tightly. Once closed, do not re-open it to put more material in.

This information is available in alternate format. Contact Michelle Waters-Ekanem, Director of Diversity/Civil Rights at 617-292-5751.

TTY# MassRelay Service 1-800-439-2370

MassDEP Website: www.mass.gov/dep

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5. Label the container "Universal Waste - Broken fluorescent lamp" and date it. If possible, place the container in a well-ventilated area, or where other spent lamps are stored for recycling. You may legally store the containerized broken lamp for up to a year from the date on the container, but we recommend recycling or disposing of it as soon as possible, in case mercury vapors leak out of the container.

Cleanup Procedures for Carpeted Surfaces

[Research performed by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection](#) has shown that, after standard cleanup procedures, some residual mercury may remain on the carpet.

If the carpet is in an area where young children or pregnant women may be exposed, it is advisable to cut out and replace the section of the carpet where the breakage occurred in order to remove any residual mercury.

If carpeting is not removed, follow the previous cleanup steps 1 through 5.

After completing these steps, ventilate the area to the outside to the best of your ability, using a fan if possible. Keep foot traffic off the immediate area of breakage for several days.

Ventilate the area when it is next vacuumed and remove and dispose of the vacuum bag or empty and wipe out the canister immediately afterwards. If possible, vent the area to the outside the next few times the area is vacuumed.

For questions, or for additional guidance, call the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Mercury Hotline toll-free at 866-9-MERCURY (866-963-7287) or the Bureau of Environmental Health in the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) at 617-624-5757.