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## Eco-friendly lighting to have bright future in homes

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

The compact fluorescent lamp, or CFL, is the signature green product of our time.

Retailers and utilities promote them incessantly, and New Yorker magazine cover even showed a green Statue of Liberty holding a CFL as her torch.

But as we look forward to a bright future for energy-efficient lighting, the standard swirly shaped CFL suddenly has some company. Ultra-eco-friendly LED (light-emitting diode) bulbs are becoming more affordable, and even the traditional incandescent bulb is getting a green makeover.

**Q:** It's great that new types of energy-efficient bulbs are being developed, but isn't that mainly because CFLs have a lot of problems?

**A:** Not really. Although many consumers had bad experiences with CFLs when they were first introduced, most of those performance issues have been resolved. Today's CFLs work in a variety of applications and provide differing types of light, depending on which kind of CFL you choose. Internet resources such as [www.ewg.org/greenlightbulbs](http://www.ewg.org/greenlightbulbs) and [www.seattle.gov/light/conserves/resident](http://www.seattle.gov/light/conserves/resident) will help you find the right CFL.

CFLs have earned their iconic status. The use of CFLs instead of standard incandescent bulbs can reduce greenhouse-gas emissions caused by lighting by 75 percent, according to the nonprofit Rocky Mountain Institute. Seattle City Light says CFLs can potentially cut consumers' lighting costs by 75 percent as well.

**Q:** The mercury in CFLs is what bothers me. Is anything being done about that?

**A:** Because they contain a small amount of mercury, CFLs need to be recycled. An increasing number of retailers, including Bartell Drugs and McLendon Hardware locally, accept CFLs from the public for recycling at no charge. Visit [www.TakeItBackNetwork.org](http://www.TakeItBackNetwork.org) to find recycling locations.

A bill in the Washington Legislature this year would have required lighting manufacturers to provide recycling options for mercury-containing light bulbs or tubes, at no charge to the public. This bill made its way through the House but ran out of time for a floor vote. It will be introduced again in 2010.

If a CFL bulb breaks in your home, you need to clean it up carefully. For advice, go to [www.epa.gov/mercury/spills](http://www.epa.gov/mercury/spills) or call the Household Hazards Line, operated by the Local Hazardous Waste Management Program in King County, at 206-296-4692.

**Q:** What's the latest on LED bulbs?

**A:** LEDs are even more efficient and longer-lasting than CFLs, and like incandescents, they do not contain mercury. Since LEDs typically send out light in a narrow stream, it's been challenging for the lighting industry to produce inexpensive LEDs that work for varied home uses.

But they've made huge advances recently, and the price of a high-quality home LED bulb has dropped to about \$40. Once they

get down to the \$20-30 range, which may happen in a few years, they will be more practical for certain home applications.

Organic light-emitting diodes, or OLEDs, have even greater potential. Just as efficient as LEDs but more versatile, OLEDs can be spread flush across a surface, so someday your entire wall could be a light source.

**Q:** Is it true that standard incandescent bulbs are going to be banned?

**A:** Under a federal law, many general-purpose light bulbs must be 30 percent more energy-efficient, starting in 2012. Though this will take some incandescent bulbs off the market, lighting manufacturers are feverishly developing bulbs to meet this standard. One of these new greener incandescent bulbs is already available but costs about \$6. That compares with well under \$1 for existing bulbs, but prices for the new bulbs should go down.

**Q:** What are the best ways I can go green with my lighting right now?

**A:** The city of Seattle's Green Home Lighting Guide, an excellent resource, is online ([www.betterhomelighting.com](http://www.betterhomelighting.com) at lower right on the screen), or call 206-615-0731 (City Green Building) for a copy. Seattle City Light and Puget Sound Energy sponsor programs offering CFL bulbs at big discounts at many local retailers.

CFLs remain the greenest, most practical choice for consumers for now. But stay tuned. In the near future we may see things in a whole new light.

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