



Spent Fluorescent Bulb Management

Fluorescent or High Intensity Discharge (HID) lighting can be managed as a **universal waste** as long as it is recycled. Using Fluorescent or HID lighting is a good business choice because they use less energy and produce less heat than incandescent lighting.

Universal wastes are wastes that meet hazardous waste criteria, but – because they pose a relatively low risk compared to other hazardous wastes, and are generated by a wide variety and large number of businesses – they are exempt from regulation as a hazardous waste as long as they are recycled.

Fluorescent and HID lamps (as well as some types of neon lamps) contain mercury. Mercury is a toxic metal that can accumulate in living tissue and cause adverse health effects. When a lamp is broken or placed in a landfill or incinerator, the mercury can contaminate the air, surface water and ground water.

Bulbs should not be crushed unless specialized equipment is used to prevent the release of mercury vapors. 55-gallon drums may be outfitted with special bulb crushers that have an enclosed tube for inserting the fluorescent bulb, a rod for breaking the bulb, and a vent with a small HEPA filter to capture any mercury vapors that are created. In order to operate a bulb crusher in New Mexico you must notify NMED of your intentions. You can find additional requirements for drum top bulb crushers at NMAC 20.4.1.1001.

Fluorescent and HID lights save energy and money but they do require special disposal considerations. Since some lamps contain hazardous levels of mercury, they should not be disposed in landfills. New Mexico businesses and governmental facilities generating spent fluorescent and HID lamps (“Generators”) are encouraged to recycle their spent lamps. The majority of facilities are Small Quantity Handlers of **universal waste**, which means they cannot accumulate more than 5,000kg of universal waste at any time.

What does a Small Quantity Handler need to comply with?

- Manage spent bulbs in a way that prevents breakage and releases to the environment.
- Keep containers and boxes of spent bulbs closed.
- Immediately contain and transfer any spent bulbs that show evidence of leakage or damage to an appropriate container.
- Label or mark the container holding spent bulbs to indicate that it is a waste or universal waste. For example, universal waste lamps should be marked as “Universal Waste Lamps,” “Waste Lamps,” or “Used Lamps,” etc.
- Accumulate spent bulbs for no longer than one year (a handler must be able to demonstrate the length of time that a universal waste has been accumulated from the date it became a waste or is received).
- Ensure that employees handling spent bulbs are familiar with proper handling and emergency procedures, relative to their responsibilities.

If you have any questions concerning spent fluorescent bulbs or universal waste, please call the New Mexico Environment Department’s Hazardous Waste Bureau for further assistance and information. The contact telephone number is (505) 476-6000.