

Assembly Bill 2208

Mercury Lamp Pollution Prevention Act

Assembly Member Ash Kalra

SUMMARY

AB 2208 would phase out fluorescent lamps in general lighting applications by banning the sale of compact fluorescent lamps starting on January 1st, 2024, and the sale of linear fluorescent lamps starting on January 1st, 2025. By ushering out fluorescent lamps, this bill will allow better alternatives to light the way to a safer, more energy-efficient future.

BACKGROUND

For many years, fluorescent lamps have been used as an energy-efficient alternative to incandescent bulbs. Unfortunately, these lamps contain mercury, a potent toxin that can cause permanent damage to the central nervous system. This effect is especially pronounced in children, as prenatal exposure to mercury is tied to decreased cognitive ability after birth.ⁱ

Despite the severe effects of mercury upon human health, the state's attempts to mitigate contamination from fluorescent lamps have been insufficient. Even though California is one of seven states that have either banned mercury-added lamps from being disposed in the regular trash or enacted Extended Producer Responsibility laws, low lamp recycling rates and accidental breakage still cause significant mercury release. Therefore, each fluorescent lamp must be viewed as a potentially serious health risk to consumers, their families, and the solid waste management workers who encounter them in the trash.

Compared to fluorescent lamps, light-emitting diode bulbs (LEDs) are a much safer and more effective lighting option. LEDs do not contain mercury and are therefore safe to handle even when broken. They also only use about half the electricity as a fluorescent lamp while lasting 2-3 times longer, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and saving consumers money. Best of all, LEDs can be readily installed in 100% of compact fluorescent outlets and 93% of linear fluorescent outlets. The remaining outlets can also support LEDs if the bulb bypasses the outlet's ballast.

The Appliance Standards Awareness Project (ASAP) estimates that by 2030, California's residential, commercial, and industrial consumers could save

about \$1 billion annually on their utility bills if they transition from the most common fluorescent lamps to LEDs. ASAP also projects that by 2030, California could see annual electricity savings of about 5,600 gigawatt hours, preventing the release of 950,000 metric tons of CO₂ per year.

The state of Vermont has already recognized the need to phase out fluorescent lamps. Specifically, a 2011 Vermont law only permits the sale of fluorescent lamps until there is a mercury-free alternative that performs just as well for an equal or lower cost.ⁱⁱ The law has already led to a statewide ban on the sale of compact fluorescent lamps. The European Union has even gone a step further and ruled that it will phase out all general-use fluorescent lamps by August 2023.

SOLUTION

AB 2208 would prohibit the sale and distribution as a new manufactured product of compact fluorescent lamps and linear fluorescent lamps starting on January 1st, 2024, and January 1st, 2025, respectively. However, this bill would exempt certain specialty fluorescent lamps, including those used in image capture, image projection, and disinfection.

SUPPORT AS OF 3/2/22

National Stewardship Action Council (Sponsor)
Active San Gabriel Valley
Atrium 916
California Electronic Asset Recovery (CEAR)
Clean Water Action
Environmental Working Group
GreenWaste
Safer States
Turtle Island Restoration Network

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ⁱ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3096006/>

ⁱⁱ <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/10/164A/07152>