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Dewey: Brighter future with light bulb recycling

By **Jennifer Dewey**/ Guest Columnist

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Six months ago, the town of Belmont launched a program to recycle compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs. CFLs are up to 75 percent more energy-efficient than incandescent bulbs but contain a small amount of mercury and therefore require special disposal. Since the program started, town residents have turned in more than 250 CFLs, including 4-foot tubes and bulbs. Belmont Health Department Director Donna Moultrup, who secured the grant funding for the recycling program, said, "We're pleased that residents are appreciative of the service."

Although CFLs contain mercury, the environmental benefits of using CFLs far outweigh the mercury risks. Coal-fired power plants (which generate more than half our nation's electricity) are the leading source of U.S. mercury emissions. To produce the electricity to run an incandescent bulb, these power plants emit more mercury than to run a CFL for the same time plus the mercury contained in the bulb. Unlike coal power plants, which emit mercury directly into the atmosphere, proper disposal of CFLs ensures mercury will not be a health or environmental issue.

"When we sell a CFL bulb, we tell the customer to be sure to return it for recycling," said Cindy Cavatorta, customer service representative at Hillside Gardens, which is one of three collection locations in town. "We wanted to be a drop-off center because it's good for the environment and it offers a great service for our customers."

CFLs not only reduce air pollution and global warming emissions, but also save money. Because a CFL uses less energy than an incandescent light bulb and lasts up to 10 times longer, replacing an incandescent with a CFL can save a homeowner more than \$30 over the lifetime of the bulb. CFLs are available in a wide range of sizes and shapes, and can fit nearly any fixture in the home, including those with a dimmer switch. And like traditional bulbs, soft white and cool white CFLs are available.

If every American household replaced just one traditional light bulb with a CFL, we would save enough power to light more than 2.5 million homes for a year, save more than \$500 million in energy costs, and prevent global warming emissions equivalent to nearly 800,000 cars. It's a simple action with a tremendous impact.

Join the nearly 40,000 New Englanders who have committed to saving energy and money by taking the ENERGY STAR Change a Light Pledge at www.energystar.gov. In this campaign, consumers pledge to change at least one incandescent light bulb to a CFL that has earned EPA's ENERGY STAR label.

By combining CFLs with other smart household solutions such as buying energy efficient appliances and driving a fuel-efficient vehicle, Belmont residents can take a big step toward reducing their environmental impact and ensuring a healthy world for future

generations.

CFL drop-off locations are at: Hillside Gardens, 280 Blanchard Road, from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday; the Belmont Municipal Light Department, 40 Prince St., 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday; and the Department of Public Works office, Homer Building, 19 Moore St., from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Jennifer Dewey is a member of Sustainable Belmont