

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Environmental Fact Sheet

Some Used Lamps Are Universal Wastes

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is promoting the safe recycling and disposal of certain used lamps, especially fluorescent and high intensity discharge (HID) lamps. The Agency believes that this waste can be better managed under EPA's universal waste program, and is therefore adding used hazardous waste lamps to its universal waste rule. This approach will achieve better control of hazardous emissions while streamlining many regulatory requirements for industry. It will also encourage the manufacture of low-mercury lamps and will make the requirements for handling and disposal of these materials consistent with many state programs.

Background

To streamline environmental regulations for wastes that are generated by large numbers of businesses in relatively small quantities, EPA issued the universal waste rule in 1995. It is designed to reduce the amount of hazardous waste items in the municipal solid waste stream; encourage the recycling and proper disposal of some common hazardous wastes; and reduce the regulatory burden on businesses that generate these wastes.

Universal wastes are usually items commonly thrown into the trash by households and small businesses (such as batteries, thermostats, and obsolete agricultural pesticides). Although handlers of universal wastes must meet less stringent standards for storing, transporting, and collecting wastes, the wastes must comply with full hazardous waste requirements for final recycling, treatment, or disposal. This management structure removes these wastes from municipal landfills and incinerators, which provides stronger safeguards for public health and the environment.

Before this rule, many used lamps had to be disposed of as hazardous waste because they frequently contain mercury, and sometimes lead. The decision to classify discarded hazardous waste lamps as universal wastes was based on comments received on EPA's 1994 proposal for managing such lamps, and on a 1997 study of mercury emissions from discarded lamps. The study showed that these emissions would be reduced under the universal waste approach.

Action

Hazardous waste lamps are added to the federal list of universal wastes regulated under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA). Regulating these lamps as a universal waste under 40 CFR Part 273 provides better management of them and facilitates compliance with RCRA hazardous waste requirements. This rule also makes the federal requirements for this waste more consistent with many state programs. Participation in energy-efficient lighting schemes under EPA's Green Lights program is not affected by this rule.

For More Information

The *Federal Register* notice, this fact sheet, and related documents are available on the Internet at <<http://epa.gov/epaoswer/osw/hazwaste.htm#id>>. For additional information or to order paper copies of any documents, call the RCRA Hotline. Callers within the Washington Metropolitan Area must dial 703-412-9810 or TDD 703-412-3323 (hearing impaired). Long-distance callers may call 1-800-424-9346 or TDD 1-800-553-7672. The RCRA Hotline operates weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Address written requests to: RCRA-Docket@epa.gov or RCRA Information Center (5305W), US EPA, 401 M Street SW, Washington, DC 20460.