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Incandescents vs. Fluorescents

I agree with David Henderson's Oct. 2 op-ed, "Let There Be (Incandescent) Light," about the inherent problems of legislating the use of compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) and the phase-out of incandescents. But I was surprised he did not mention what I consider the biggest bugaboo of all: the disposal problem with CFLs. They contain small amounts of mercury and cannot simply be thrown in the trash, which many people do not know. Likewise, consumers do not realize that when these bulbs break, the mercury is released into the immediate environment, posing a health hazard.

If Americans will no longer have the choice to use the less dangerous incandescents, then adequate recycling and reclamation programs must be established, along with public education programs that advise consumers of all ages on how to dispose of intact CFLs, as well as how to handle any broken bulbs and their toxic contents.

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David Henderson's op-ed, like its subject, emitted much heat and little light. Mr. Henderson criticized com-

pact fluorescent bulbs because they can take a minute to reach full brightness and because earlier versions were bulky and did not live up to their potential of lasting 10 times as long as incandescent lamps.

Since the CFLs produce useful light immediately and one minute is not long, what's the problem? The earlier-versions argument essentially refutes itself. The additional electrical cost to run incandescents vastly outweighs their initial cost advantage.

Mr. Henderson decried the incandescent ban as being prescriptive, unlike cap-and-trade climate legislation. Yet he apparently has no problem with banning mountain-top removal or new coal-fired generating plants. Actually, as Mr. Henderson noted, the U.S. law does not require the use of CFLs; it just requires more-efficient lamps. These may be CFLs, LEDs or even better incandescents.

Cap-and-trade, coal restrictions, lamp efficiency requirements and other measures can work in concert toward solving the climate change challenge.

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My article in Chesapeake, (the Maryland Sierra Club newsletter), entitled Mercury and Lighting addresses the issue of mercury in CFLs.

See: <http://www.conservationengineering.com/LightingandMercury.pdf>

OR http://maryland.sierraclub.org/newsletter/archives/2007/07/a_012.asp

There is a prize for bringing very good LED lamps to market. At least one company is claiming the prize. See: <http://www.lightingprize.org/>