



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull  
 Environment Minister  
 Parliament House  
 Canberra ACT 2600  
 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2007

Dear Minister,

**RE: ACOR seeks meeting re recycling of fluorescent lights**

The health risk posed by the continued disposal to landfill of mercury-containing fluorescent lights is a real and documented problem. When internationally eminent experts such as Professor Buckeridge from RMIT warn of disastrous consequences, it's time to take action.

The Australian Council of Recyclers is calling on Federal Government to act now to introduce a national recycling program for fluorescent tubes, HID lamps and compact fluorescents. Most other industrialised nations already recycle 70–80% of these mercury-containing lights. Australia has a mercury-recovery facility capable of processing 100% of all lamps and bulbs, yet we are currently recycling less than 1%.

It's simply not good enough for anyone to downplay the risk, by pointing to the very small amount of mercury in each lamp, as compared to that in a thermometer or watch battery. It is the total quantum of lamps dumped each year, and the total amount of mercury that enters our environment, that are the relevant figures for the nation's health.

Some 70 million fluorescent lights are currently disposed of to landfill each year in Australia, and that figure is expected to increase by 17–20 million each year with the recently announced Federal Government's mandated move from incandescent lights to fluorescents.

Householders have two choices when lamps are at the end of their life – discard them into their waste or recycling bins. Both actions will contaminate either the recyclable materials (and expose material recovery workers to health risks) or contaminate products from alternate waste technology plants, such as compost and soil conditioners. There is potential for air and/or groundwater contamination when mercury is dumped into landfills.

We support the recent policy announcement of the move to fluorescent lighting, as it will have a significant beneficial effect on the emission of greenhouse gases. However, we don't want to solve a carbon issue by creating a mercury issue. Policy changes such as this can be handled in Europe, because these waste products are covered by the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive, but Australia is still ignoring the need for this type of legislation. Until adequate product stewardship policy is introduced in Australia, our solutions will continue to be pursued hotly by their unintended consequences.

The Australian Council of Recyclers is calling for an urgent meeting with Federal and State authorities to develop, implement and promote a nationwide affordable and workable recovery and recycling program to ensure these materials are responsibly recycled.

Yours sincerely,

CEO

CC Mary Harwood, Division Head, Environmental Quality Division, DEWR  
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