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STEPHEN D. COAN
STATE FIRE MARSHAL

MEMORANDUM

TO: Heads of Fire Departments

FROM: Stephen D. Coan
State Fire Marshal

DATE: March 1, 2010

SUBJECT: **Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFLs)**

As the use of Compact Fluorescent Lights (CFLs) become more common in homes as an energy saving measure, a number of issues have been reported locally to this office, and nationally to the U. S. Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC).

CFLs contain a ballast at the base of the unit between the spiral tube and the base. This ballast, encased in a plastic shell may or may not have visible vent holes or slots.

The ballast contains a Voltage Dependant Resistor that, when failure occurs, open like a fuse to protect the device and associated electrical equipment. The resultant smoke and heat should escape through the vent holes in the housing Light smoke may be visible, and the distinctive "burned ballast" odor will be present. Often, soot or an oily gooey residue may be detected at the vent holes. The vents may not always be visible, unless the bulb is removed from the socket (see attachment).

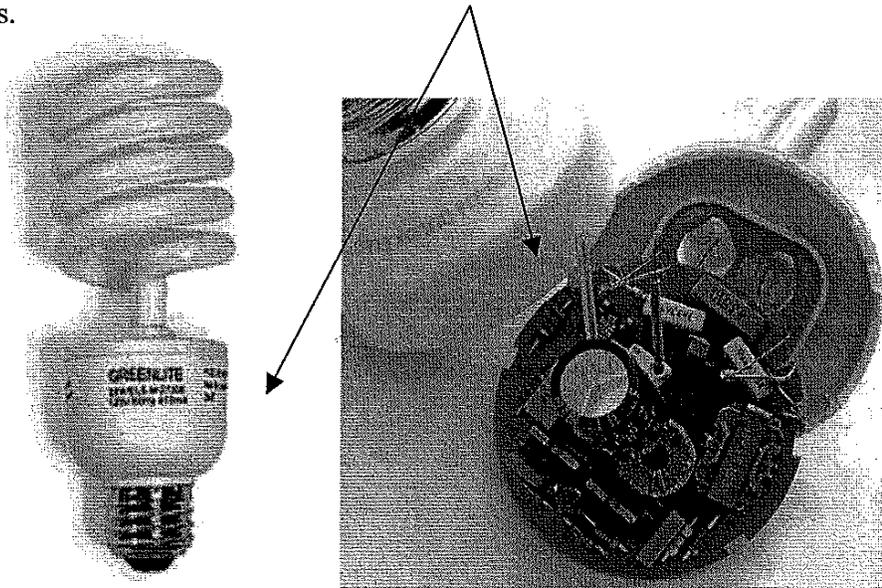
Since more of these CFLs are finding there way into homes, they should not be overlooked when investigating smoke odors.

If you have any questions, or require assistance, please contact the Code Compliance & Enforcement Unit at (978) 567-3375 or in western Massachusetts at (413) 587-3181.

Attachment

Administrative Services • Hazardous Materials Response
Massachusetts Firefighting Academy • Division of Fire Safety

A CFL bulb contains a ballast at the base of the unit between the spiral tube and (Edison) screw. This ballast, encased in a plastic shell, may or may not have visible vent holes or slots.



The ballast contains a Voltage Dependent Resistor that, when failure occurs, opens like a fuse to protect the device and associated electrical equipment. The resultant heat and smoke should escape from the vents in the housing. Light smoke may be visible and one will smell that distinct electrical ballast odor. As in the case the other night, there were visible smoke marks and a small, brown oily/goosey residue at the vent holes. These signs were not visible with the bulb in its socket.

Since more CFL bulbs are finding their way into the home, don't overlook these items when investigating a smoke odor.