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Climate protection: EU resolves to switch off light bulb starting 2009

Regulation valid throughout EU will save some 15.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide per year by 2020

The range of energy efficiency in households lamps is broad. Use of more efficient lighting can help protect the climate while also saving consumers money. On 8 December 2008, the EU Member States, upon recommendation of the EU Commission, resolved certain minimum efficiency requirements in household lighting fixtures. They stipulate that lamps with low efficiency should be withdrawn from the market, amounting to the discontinued use of most light bulbs. Thanks to the measures taken, power consumption in the EU's private households will decrease by 39 terawatt hours per year, that is by five percent by the year 2020. An equivalent of some 15.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide that is harmful to the climate can be saved in this manner.

The light bulb phase-out will occur in four stages. In the initial stage starting 1 September 2009, all non-clear and other bulbs with a brightness of over 75 watts will be taken off the market. By September 2010 all standard lamps-- bulbs with standard bulbs, E27 socket, a 1,000-hour lifetime and without krypton gas filling- that have a brightness of more than 60 watts, will be withdrawn from the market. By September 2011, lamps with brightness of more than 40 watts will follow. Starting 1 September 2012, no lamps over 10 watts will be available. As concerns halogen lamps, only the more efficient types will be on store shelves as of 2016. Compact fluorescent lamps, also known as energy-saver lamps, are already much more efficient than halogen and other lamps. Nevertheless, only the especially efficient models may be marketed as of the first stage of the phase-out.

Conventional lamps can be replaced with compact fluorescent lamps and efficient halogen lamps. There has been strong growth in recent years in this range of lamps and associated technology. The imminent phase-out will serve to further advance these developments.

"Consumers are well-advised to make a switch to efficient lamps, especially compact fluorescent lamps, as early as possible, because electricity costs can be saved as well as emissions of harmful carbon dioxide", advises Dr. Thomas Holzmann, Vice President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA).

The endorsed regulation also includes requirements of lamp features. Compact fluorescent lamps, for example, must have an average lifetime of at least 6,000 hours starting 1 September 2009. The light output of all lamps decreases during their lifetime, and the regulation sets limits on this. Other requirements concern the number of switching cycles that a lamp must achieve without malfunction, the time needed until it comes on, as well as the time needed to achieve a certain brightness. This will definitely mean the end to low-quality compact fluorescent lamps.

Compact fluorescent lamps as well as other fluorescent lamps contain mercury to fulfil their purpose. However, mercury is harmful to health, which is why these lamps must not be disposed of after use with household waste or in the used glass bin. Instead, they must be taken to an appropriate collection point so that the mercury can be recovered separately, and the bulb's glass recycled.

Return of the lamps is free of charge for private citizens, but unfortunately the obligation to return them is not widely known. Moreover, the possibilities for return at a collection point often involve long inconvenient trips. UBA Vice President Holzmann therefore concludes that "since the EU regulation will bring about a shift in the market in favour of compact fluorescent lamps, there is an urgent need to institute some consumer-friendly disposal options." The voluntary redemption and proper disposal of used compact fluorescent lamps through municipal collection points or systems set up by manufacturers offers the electric and electronics sector a means to create closer ties to their customers. There are a large number of collection points set up especially for commercial consumers. Information about disposal options is available from municipal waste authorities as well as from some specialised retailers.

The EU also decided that consumers must be better informed, and therefore manufacturers will in future be obliged to provide information on packaging, such as about mercury content.

The EU legislation is an implementing measure under the Eco-Design Directive and enters into force immediately in all Member States. Transposition German law is therefore not necessary.

You will find more information at <http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/energie/index.htm>.

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