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Joint press release by The Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) and the Federal Environment Agency

Hoarding light bulbs is nonsense Energy-saving lamps are always the best choice

The energy experts agree that both cost and environmental factors provide good reasons to bid the light bulb farewell. Some see this differently and are hoarding light bulbs, probably because of old prejudices held against energy-saving lamps. Experts in electricity savings at the Federation of German Consumer Organisations (vzbv) and the Federal Environment Agency are doing away with these prejudices, declaring that conventional light bulbs are really not too 'bright': they only convert about five percent of the energy they absorb into light. The better choice is modern energy-saving lamps, for they save energy, are longer-lasting, and are thus better for the household budget.

The most often heard criticism of the compact fluorescent lamp, or energy-saving lamp, is that it takes quite a while to become bright, emits cold light, and breaks easily. In fact, the brightening time in quality compact fluorescent lamps has been reduced. The colour of light comes in various shades, and warm white is the most similar to light bulb light. Moreover, good quality compact fluorescent lamps can be switched on and off about 30,000 times before they break, say the energy experts. The much-debated health risks associated with electromagnetic fields are also unfounded. The production of compact fluorescent lamps may be more costly than that of light bulbs, but a study commissioned by the EC Commission showed that in terms of product life cycle, compact fluorescent lamps rate considerably better overall in terms of the environmental impact observed.

It is important that consumers not only seek to purchase the cheapest lamp, but also to pay attention to quality. Brand-name products are often better than low-cost, no-name lamps. Quality comes at a price, but it will last longer and prove more cost effective in the long run. Consumer information is available from independent organisations. The 03/2008 edition of the Stiftung Warentest magazine has information on quality lamps.

More information about lighting engineering is available at www.verbraucherzentrale-energieberatung.de/ and www.uba.de/energie/licht. There is also a Federal Environment Agency flyer with tips about energy saving lamps titled *Bye bye Glühbirne: Warum Energiesparlampen besser sind* (in German): www.umweltdaten.de/publikationen/fpdf-l/3754.pdf and a paper by the vzbv at: www.verbraucherzentrale-energieberatung.de/web/fileadmin/presse/pms/Hintergrundpapier_Energiesparlampen.pdf.

The new EC Directive on household lamps envisions a savings of 39 terrawatt hours of energy by 2020, as compared to the current trend. That corresponds to the volume of what 11 million households consume in one year. The switch to energy-saving lamps could save more than 15 million tonnes of carbon dioxide throughout the EU by 2020. The directive foresees the gradual disappearance of the inefficient conventional light bulbs from store shelves by 2012. It also sets requirements for other household lamps in terms of efficiency and performance characteristics such as service life. Some compact fluorescent lamps, halogen lamps and LED lamps meet these requirements. Substandard lamps are meant to disappear from the market in this way and raise the quality of the products on offer for consumers. It is therefore not even necessary to hoard light bulbs, as it only harms the environment and the household budget.

Consumer reactions have not been the same everywhere. Whereas 2009 first quarter sales of light bulbs rose by 17 percent in Germany, according to data from a leading global market research company, the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK), they dropped by 8.6 percent in France, by 22.5 percent in Great Britain, and even 34.5 percent in the Netherlands.

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