



The lights are on but is anybody home?

Environmental NGOs welcome legislative moves to ban traditional light bulbs but warn against the environmental costs of proposed alternatives

[Brussels, 3 December 2008] - Environmental citizens' organisations EEB, ECOS, INFORSE Europe and the Zero Mercury Group [1] (ENGOs) warn that simply banning traditional incandescent light bulbs is not enough to solve the problem of energy efficiency in lighting. The advisory comes ahead of an EU governments' vote to ban traditional light bulbs on December 8th as part of the Ecodesign of Energy-Using Products (EuP) Directive.

"Banning incandescent bulbs from the European market is one of the many ways to decrease household energy use, a huge contributor to climate emissions in Europe," asserted Nathalie Cliquot, EEB Waste and Products Policy Officer. *"However, this decision doesn't show understanding of the market - simply switching from one inefficient light bulb to another one is not the answer."*

The draft EuP measure proposes to phase-out the old technology of incandescent bulbs, but to leave standard replacement halogens on the market until 2016 [2]. This would seriously undermine the energy-saving potential- an energy loss equivalent to half the combined household electricity consumption of the 12 new Eastern European Member States. In addition, the transition from inefficient lamps would take up to 10 years. ENGOs are therefore calling on Member States to ban not only incandescent bulbs but also standard halogens (conventional and xenon gas filled) and to shorten the implementation period to 5 years to ensure additional halogens do not flood the market in the interim.

ENGOs also believe more should be done to tackle the issue of mercury in energy efficient compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs.) With increased uptake of these CFLs, Member States should be prepared to properly deal with their mercury content. To minimise the risks associated with mercury, EU law already prescribes that such lamps be collected separately when they are discarded. [3] However, currently less than one third of these lamps are actually collected and disposed of properly.

"Consumers need more information on how and where to dispose of mercury-containing lamps and what to do when they break," said Elena Lymberidi-Settimo, EEB Zero Mercury Campaign Project Coordinator. *"While we certainly need to switch to energy efficient light bulbs in Europe to help stop climate change, we must also ensure that we do not create new hazardous impacts along the way such as releasing mercury into the environment."*

ENGOs are urging mandatory packaging and internet information requirements, as well as information and awareness campaigns, for CFLs on the health risks associated with mercury as well as instructions for proper, separate collection after use and accidental breakage. [4] We also encourage EU policy makers to continue to invest in research into energy efficient and hazardous-free lamps (e.g. LED).

By setting ambitious targets, appropriate recycling schemes and investing in research into new, safer and more efficient lighting technology, the EU could dramatically accelerate energy and CO₂ savings in Europe.

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Editors' Notes:-

[1] The **European Environmental Bureau** (EEB) is Europe's largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations, with 145 member organisations based in all EU Member States and most Accession Countries, as well as in a few neighbouring countries. EEB aims to protect and improve the environment of Europe and to enable its citizens to play their part in achieving that goal. [www.eeb.org]

ECOS is a consortium of Environmental NGOs created to enhance the voice of environmental protection in the standardisation processes. [www.ecostandard.org]

The **Zero Mercury Working Group** is an international coalition of over 75 Public-interest non-governmental organisations from around the world formed in 2005 by the European Environmental Bureau and the Mercury Policy Project. The group's aim is to reach 'zero' emissions, demand and supply of mercury, from all sources we can control, towards eliminating mercury in the environment, at EU level and globally." [www.zeromercury.org]

INFORSE Europe is a network of 70 European NGOs working for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources. [<http://www.inforse.org/europe>]

[2] Incandescent light bulbs are the traditional short-lived bulbs with filament, one of the least energy efficient ways of producing light. Such bulbs are cheap to buy but costly to use and indirectly responsible for a lot of CO₂ emissions. Alternatives to incandescent bulbs include: halogen lamps, which also have a relatively low energy performance; compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), which are 75% more energy efficient than incandescent and long-lasting but contain hazardous mercury (so they need to be properly recycled) and may emit electromagnetic fields; and light emitting diodes (LEDs), a very efficient technology that is already used for some applications, such as traffic signals and spotlights, but cannot yet compete with the strongest lamps for high illumination. However, technological improvement is foreseen and these lamps do not contain hazardous substances.

A complete NGO briefing on the EU's policy proposal for the switch to energy efficient lighting can be found at: http://www.ecostandard.org/downloads_a/briefing_ligthing_in_eup_21-11-08.pdf

[3] WEEE Directive (Directive 2002/96/EC)

[4] For further information on mercury-containing lamps please see:

http://zeromercury/080627_EEB_conf_lamps.html, including presentation of a US report on breakage.