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The new bulbs

LISA JAFFE HUBBELL • APRIL 19, 2009

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1. The savings really add up. CFLs (compact fluorescent light bulbs) use 75% less energy and last up to 10 times longer than regular bulbs. "This is an instance where the environmental and financial benefits coincide," says Maria Tikoff Vargas of the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star program.

2. They can be used just like incandescent bulbs. Exceptions: Not all CFLs work with dimmer switches; their efficiency decreases if the light goes on and off a lot (i.e., fridges); and they may not be the best choice for directional lighting or where lighting is a design element.

3. They turn on immediately. Some may take a minute to reach their brightest level, but newer CFLs only get better, says Susan Bloom of Philips Lighting, a light bulb manufacturer.

4. They don't turn the room blue. CFLs today have much better color properties than in the past and come in a range of color temperatures -- even cool white, which simulates daylight, according to Bloom.

5. CFLs don't increase mercury in the environment. They do contain a small amount, but it's not a problem if they are recycled properly.

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