

Bright Ideas

By Reg P. Wydeven
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In our house, some of the bedrooms are upstairs and some of them are downstairs. So to avoid broken necks from tumbling down stairs during a half-asleep sprint to our daughter's room to hug away a nightmare, we keep several lights on all night.

Because of our 24-hour beacons, we have a higher than average light bulb budget. Adding insult to injury, I need to drag a ladder inside to change the bulb in the light fixture in the stairway. Of course, I need to take out several screws and unhook chains just to get at the bulbs. Although I have formal training in changing bulbs from my college days as a supervisor of building maintenance, changing the stairway light bulbs still drives me crazy.

Therefore, when fluorescent light bulbs were on clearance sale at the hardware store, I picked up a pack because they theoretically last 10 times longer than regular light bulbs. So now the light flickers a second before it comes on, and there's a slightly yellowish aura in the stairwell, but I haven't been up on the ladder for months.

It's a good thing I'm so pleased with my fluorescent bulbs, because they seem to be the wave of the illumination future. In fact, a new law has been introduced in California to eventually ban the use of traditional light bulbs in favor of fluorescent bulbs.

Dubbed the "How Many Legislators Does it Take to Change a Light Bulb Act," the bill would ban the use of incandescent light bulbs by 2012 and require California residents to use compact fluorescent light bulbs (COLS). The bill is the first of its kind in the U.S. and is designed to conserve energy and reduce greenhouse gases which are linked to global warming. Comedian Conan O'Brien, however, believes the motivation for the law is the fact that Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger can't pronounce "incandescent".

According to Energy Star, the joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy created to reduce energy costs while protecting the environment, COLS generate 70% less heat than regular light bulbs and save an average of at least \$30 in energy costs over the lifetime of a COL bulb. Energy Star claims that in addition to using 75% less energy and lower greenhouse emissions, COLS provide the same amount of light as traditional bulbs.

According to Lloyd Levine, the California assemblyman who first proposed the initiative, 2% of all energy produced is used to power incandescent lighting. Coincidentally, Wal-Mart recently announced its goal to sell 100 million compact fluorescent light bulbs by the end of 2007. If the mega-store reaches its goal, the company believes it has the potential to save customers as much as \$3 billion in electrical costs over the life of COLS.

Opponents of the bill claim that COLS are too expensive, the light they provide isn't adequate and it is yellowish and unnatural. Granted, I never bought any until they were on clearance, but if COLS truly last 10 times longer than regular bulbs, I will definitely save money in the end.

My biggest fear about this trend is that cartoons will be changed forever – now whenever Bugs Bunny gets an idea, that little coily fluorescent bulb will appear above his head, and I'll never get used to that.