

Synagogue Enlightens Members and Community on Energy-efficient Lighting and Light bulb Recycling

At Congregation Havurah Shalom in northwest Portland, a collection is taken once a month. That may not seem unusual for a faith community; however, this congregation is not collecting just dollars, but used batteries and fluorescent bulbs. Why? To protect people and the earth from harmful toxins—such as mercury, cadmium, nickel—these everyday products may contain.

Judy Heumann began this project in 2002, planning on collecting just once a year at High Holidays to complement the congregation's effort to encourage people to replace incandescent bulbs with more energy-efficient and longer-lasting compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). The project caught on and Judy has now delivered many box-loads collected all year long from her congregation to a Household Hazardous Waste Collection Site. At Havurah Shalom, Marilyn Forse, who was with Judy from the start, was so impressed by the bulb collection project that she has begun a collection of her own at her downtown home, Portland Plaza; Judy helps out by coming by to cart the bulbs and batteries away when she receives a call.

Typical of enthusiasm being passed along, Havurah Shalom's project dove-tailed off of a "1-2-3" program started by Rick North at First Unitarian Church. The project—used by many congregations as a result of education from Oregon Interfaith Global Warming Campaign—involves getting a whole congregation to pledge to take action. Members are challenged to commit to change one regular bulb to a compact fluorescent, drive two miles less per hour and turn down the thermostat three degrees. The congregation tallies up the carbon dioxide savings for all members who have pledged and reports it back during the service. Thus, the program allows participants to experience how small commitments make a big difference. Collectively, many in the program move on to even bigger steps such as buying a fuel-efficient car or taking public transportation.

So, what can you do with your CFLs? In the Portland metro area, hazardous waste can be delivered to Metro Central Station at 6161 NW 61st in Portland or to Metro South Station at 2001 Washington St. in Oregon City, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Saturday. There is no fee. Outside metro boundaries, call (503) 234-3000 for options. Another possibility is recycling used Compact Fluorescent Lamps and standard fluorescent tubes so that the metal and glass can be reused in other products. In the Portland metro area, CFLs and fluorescent tubes can be recycled by dropping them off at Earth Protection Services in Lake Oswego. Call (503) 620-2466 to arrange for a time.

Mercury vapor is sealed within the glass tubing in CFLs and is chosen for use because it is so efficient; it causes no risk in your household. (More information is available at lightsite.net.) Although the amount of mercury released into the air from broken bulbs is small relative to the mercury released from a coal-fired plant, anything we can do to reduce the amount of mercury—a

neurotoxin that adversely affects the developing nervous systems of babies and children—is worth doing.

Part of the impetus for Havurah Shalom's actions was the Energy Pledge, signed by the congregation after a presentation given by Teri Ruch of Oregon Interfaith Power and Light—a project of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. They were interested in ways they could lessen their use of fossil fuels in order to reduce global warming. Many choices of participation are offered under the Pledge's headings of Education and Action, including purchase of renewable energy by congregations and by individual members for their households, purchase of green tags, changing incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent light bulbs, turning hot water heaters down to 120 degrees, weatherizing doors and windows, having a lighting audit and an energy audit done, and naming a contact person to receive and distribute information to the congregation.

Why bother with all this? Saving a kilowatt-hour through cost-effective energy efficiency is cheaper than building the new generation, transmission and distribution lines that are needed to meet the growing energy demand in our region, not to mention that energy efficiency is easier on the environment.