

Bulbs die differently

Worried when you hear a compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL) pop or sizzle?

Despite confusion caused by an e-mail hoax circulating since April 2010, these sounds signal the bulb is working safely in its final hours. Smoke, a popping noise and even a slight odor are typical and do not pose a fire risk as claimed in the misleading e-mail.

According to Underwriters Laboratories, Inc. (UL), an independent not-for-profit firm that tests and sets minimum standards for electric-consuming items, about 130 to 150 million CFLs are sold every year in the U.S. While the bulbs produce 75 percent less heat than their incandescent cousins, differences between the bulbs go deeper than the amount of heat released. As the first wave of CFLs begins reaching the end of their lifespan, consumers are learning the bulbs die differently, too.

"As with any new product, it's important that consumers understand how it works," notes John Drengenberg, UL consumer affairs manager.

Most folks know traditional incandescent lightbulbs tend to burn out the same way: a pop, a flash and, when shaken, the familiar rattle confirming the bulb needs

to be changed. With CFLs, light dims over time and the lamp may produce a more dramatic pop, emit a distinct odor, and even release some smoke. Sometimes the plastic at the base of a CFL will turn black, which is normal in most cases as safety standards require application of special flame-retardant plastics.

"CFLs are one of the products we regularly test to specific requirements for electrical safety, fire and shock hazards," Drengenberg notes. "Any popping sounds or smoke that a consumer might see when a CFL burns out means that the bulb's end-of-life mechanism worked as it should have."

Consumers should look for the UL mark on packaging when purchasing CFLs. "If a CFL carries the UL mark, consumers know we have investigated it to specific safety requirements," reports Drengenberg.

For more information, visit www.SafetyAtHome.com.

Sources: Underwriters Laboratories



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