

Harford County Government Recycles Fluorescent Light Tubes

Bulb Eater Swallows Dangerous Mercury


Harford County employees, left to right, Phillip Anders, Edgar Fincham and Charles Myers demonstrate the Bulb Eater.



Harford County has initiated a program to recycle all of the burned-out fluorescent light tubes collected from county buildings. Fluorescent tubes contain a tiny ball of mercury, about 40 milligrams, that turns into a vapor during use. The recycling program will keep this highly toxic element out of the environment by using a special recycling device called a Bulb Eater.

The Bulb Eater (see picture) crushes the tubes into a 55 gallon drum. It can crush bulbs as quickly as the operator can feed them into the tube at the top of the device. The Bulb Eater uses a vacuum to contain harmful dust and vapors and has several filters to protect the equipment operator and the environment. All of the bulbs are processed on-site at the county's Department of Administration — Facilities and Operations Division. The Bulb Eater is manufactured by Air Cycle Corporation of Broadview, Illinois.

A full drum can hold more than one thousand spent tubes and weighs approximately 500 pounds. Once the drum is full, it becomes part of a nationwide recycling program. It is picked up by Air Cycle to be processed at a recycling facility, where the mercury is separated from the glass shards and metal end caps.

Approximately 650 million fluorescent lamps are disposed of each year. This generates 30,000 pounds of mercury waste a year. It is estimated that as little as 25 percent of all fluorescent bulbs are recycled in this country. Harford County is leading an effort to improve that statistic by doing its part to keep mercury from lamp bulbs out of the environment. 

COVANTA EMERGES FROM BANKRUPTCY

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Authority Executive Director

plan approved by the court maximizes creditor recovery and affords the company a solid capital structure."

Danielson has acquired 100 percent of Covanta's equity for approximately \$30 million in cash. As a result of the court's order and the financial transactions of the sale, Covanta emerged from bankruptcy with over \$50 million in cash and a revolving credit facility available.

Covanta continued to meet its obligations to operate and maintain the Montgomery County Resource Recovery Facility throughout the bankruptcy period. According to Authority Executive Director Robin Davidov, "we increased our surveillance during the bankruptcy period, but found no evidence of diminished performance by Covanta."

During the bankruptcy period, some of the contract terms were changed. The result is

significantly reduced operating costs and increased credit support to the benefit of Montgomery County.

"The bankruptcy required a higher level of management and oversight than normal by the Authority and the County," noted Ms. Davidov. "The Authority and County were determined to maintain excellent performance during the bankruptcy period and we succeeded. Art Balmer, chief of the Division of Solid Waste Services for Montgomery County and an Authority board member contributed his extensive negotiation skills in reaching a mutually acceptable agreement with Covanta."

The Montgomery County facility continues to process ever increasing amounts of trash each year. A recent article in the *Washington Post* (April 1, 2004) featured a picture of the waste pit and an article on the trash disposal needs of Montgomery County. 