

MountainKeeping Column Oct. 4, 2007

## **Change A Light, Change The World**

By Sue Counts

“Change A Light NC” has come to Watauga County. This campaign gives the citizens an opportunity “to pledge to do their part to save energy and help reduce risks of global climate change by replacing at least one light in their home with an ENERGY STAR qualified one.”

This program is being sponsored by the NC State Energy Office, NC Cooperative Extension, Blue Ridge Electric Membership Cooperative (BREMCO), and Appalachian Regional Initiative for Sustainable Energy (ARISE).

If each North Carolina home replaced just one standard light bulb with an energy-efficient Compact Fluorescent Light (CFL), we would:

- Conserve enough energy to light more than 86,000 homes for a year. CFLs use about one-quarter of the energy of standard light bulbs. Each CFL can save more than 400 pounds of coal during its lifetime.
- Save more than \$15 million in annual energy costs. CFLs last up to 10 times longer than standard bulbs, and each CFL saves about \$40 in electricity during its lifetime.
- Cut greenhouse gases equivalent to emissions from 19,000 cars a year. Most electricity in N.C. comes from burning coal, oil, and other fossil fuels. This creates pollution that contributes to ozone, haze, climate change, and other air quality problems. If every N.C. home replaced just one standard bulb with a CFL, we would reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the air by 217 million pounds per year.

Recently at the Kraut Creek Festival in downtown Boone, 61 people pledged to replace 655 bulbs with CFLs. At BREMCO’s annual meeting back in June, approximately 3,000 CFL light bulbs were given to the citizens of Watauga, Ashe, Alleghany, and Caldwell counties.

### **Handle CFLs Properly**

CFLs contain a very small amount of mercury sealed within the glass tubing -- an average of 5 milligrams, which would cover the tip of a ballpoint pen. No mercury is released when the bulbs are intact or in use. By comparison, older thermometers contain about 500 milligrams of mercury. It would take 100 CFLs to equal that amount.

Mercury currently is an essential component of CFLs, making the bulb an efficient light source. Many manufacturers have taken significant steps to reduce mercury used in their

fluorescent lighting products. Go to [http://energystar.gov/ia/partners/promotions/changelight/downloads/Fact\\_Sheet\\_Mercury.pdf](http://energystar.gov/ia/partners/promotions/changelight/downloads/Fact_Sheet_Mercury.pdf) for more details on how to safely handle CFLs.

Presently in Watauga County, you can take your “burned out” CFL to BREMCO to recycle, but by the end of the year there will be three to four CFL recycling sites county-wide.

Change A Light, Watauga County! And learn the new Three Rs: REPLACE, REDUCE, and RECYCLE.