Older CFLs Interfere with Cable TV Equipment

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Need another reason to dread the looming incandescent ban? According to a report [1] in the Telegraph, certain older compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) interfere with TV's.

Phillips Electronics has admitted that early CFL models can interfere with cable TV equipment. When CFLs first turn on, their flickering affects the infra-red sensors on remote control receivers. This causes TVs to randomly turn on and off and switch channels.

According to a Phillips spokesman, "Some very early compact fluorescent lamps, shortly after starting, could cause interference with TV controls due to the frequency of operation of the bulb and when placed near a TV." They claim the problem is isolated to older CFLs.

Consumer Reports addresses this item [2] as far back as 2007. Their Home and Garden Blog claims that, "some electronic devices mistakenly interpret the infrared light emitted by CFLs as a signal." Apparently, Energy Star-certified CFLs don't have this issue.

Yet this is hardly the first problem associated with CFLs. In addition to the aforementioned flickering, critics point out [3] the time to achieve full brightness (three minutes), the cold bluish light, and their environmental impact (CFLs contain mercury).

Despite their unpopularity, we may be force-fed the CFL come 2012. The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 [4] mandated the phasing-out of incandescents starting in 2012. By 2014, they'll be in the same class as illicit drugs. The EU initiated similar legislation last year, and the results were sadly predictable:

mass hoarding of incandescent bulbs. In Germany, sales of 100 W incandescent bulbs rose by 80-100%.

Solid State Lighting is the way of the future, and it already has a multitude of applications. But, in this editor's opinion, LEDs are not ready to replace the incandescent bulb as a home lighting solution. GE's Energy Smart LED bulb [5], while long-lasting (17 years at 4 hrs/day), will run you $40-50. Toshiba's 93 lm/W LED bulb [6] costs ¥9,135 (approx. US $101). A cursory Web search [7] found no LED bulbs below $27.95, while some topped $100. Will prices go down? Probably.

But it would appear that, for the foreseeable future, CFLs will dominate home lighting. The long-term savings for LEDs may indeed justify the initial investment. But it'll be an uphill battle to convince consumers. After buying incandescents for $.50, they may be reluctant to spend 100x that for an LED bulb. And under no circumstances should they be forced to make that decision.

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