

## MERCURY INSTEAD OF TUNGSTEN

### THE LETTER TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND TO POLISH MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONCERNING COMPULSORY WITHDRAWAL OF THE TRADITIONAL LIGHT BULBS.

*“Still to the neighbouring ports they waft,  
Proverbial wiles and ancient craft.”  
George Gordon Byron “The Giaour”*

The main aim of the European Commission should be providing Europe with the organization structure which would guarantee development and competitiveness with regard to the rest of the world. It is puzzling, however, that it forces using harmful technology resulting in disastrous ecological and environmental effects. What we mean are so-called energy-efficient bulbs which are not, and never have been bulbs but they are simply fluorescent lamps in a compact form, not sources of light with tungsten radiant element. It is only a front – people have had enough of fluorescent lamps, and they are back by a different name and in a different shape. The Commission fails to comment on the mercury present in those forced to be used products. Its effect is contrary to the UE law forbidding producing and selling articles containing mercury and generating dangerous waste which used fluorescent lamps undoubtedly are. It is questionable why the European Commission does not mind the mercury in the fluorescent lamps.

Not a single commercial of the fluorescent lamps warns people against mercury and its toxic metabolites despite the fact that advertisements, in accordance with the binding laws, warn against inappropriately taken drugs and their health consequences. It is assessed that during the post-war period approximately 500 million fluorescent lamps, which is over 30 tons of mercury, have landed in polish rubbish dumps. Used fluorescent lights ended up in municipal rubbish dumps, were buried near the place of residence or smashed in dustbins. Also nowadays, the broken glass is put into concrete base course and other constructional materials. It is going to be the same with the next dangerous waste, namely broken fluorescent lights. The degree of contamination of the environment with mercury is going to increase.

Mercury, similarly to every chemical element, is indestructible. It has been confirmed by the European Center of the Environment Medicine (ECEM) as it stated that there is no satisfactory system of storage and destroying used fluorescent lamps containing mercury. Even if the used fluorescent lamp is returned while buying the new one, there is no guarantee of its proper utilization. Moreover, we do not believe in the utilization (which costs 1 zł per piece!) at all. Mercury is the second most dangerous (plutonium is the first) chemical element on Earth. Its organic compounds, e.g. *thimerosal* and *methyl mercury* are especially toxic. The degree of poisoning of the oceanic fish has reached the level which is dangerous for human foetal life. What is more, *thimerosal* used as a preservative in vaccines causes permanent mutilations and serious nervous system diseases, for instance autism and ADHD. These diseases currently constitute a greater hazard to the society than temporary, curable contagious illnesses. *Thimerosal*, similarly to other compounds of mercury, destroys neurons when present in even nano-molar concentrations, while officially the content of mercury in a fluorescent light is supposed to be 5 mg! From the point of view of toxicology, it does not

make any difference if citizens are poisoned with mercury from thermometers or, so-called compact fluorescent lamps. We do not want another *Minamata* in stages, which is being prepared by the European Commission. There is no room for the products containing mercury on the market, especially for ones which are so universally used as bulbs. Breaking the bulb with radiant fibre is not dangerous at all. Breaking so-called compact fluorescent lamp results in poisoning of the room. Recommended one hour ventilating can be treated only as a gloomy joke. This small amount of mercury multiplied by the number of households and the average fluorescent lights consumption gives the amount which is enough to result in births of thousands of handicapped children. Even micro-gram amount is toxic.

The official reason for this decision, given by the European Commission, is energy saving. However, it turns out to be a scarce saving. It is estimated that in a global range 20 % of the whole production of energy is used for lightning, 8% of which is used by households. Even if every person in the world changed bulbs it would result in 6 % energy saving. Real consumers of energy in our households are not bulbs, but vacuum cleaners, irons, freezers and washing machines. Also air conditioners are becoming more and more popular. A usual 3000W electric kettle during 3 minutes uses as much energy as a fluorescent light uses during 3 hours. Would anyone dare to propose withdrawal of such equipment? What kind of saving is it if we have other, much more energy-intensive devices in our households? Why is not it emphasized that the production of one fluorescent light costs ten times more energy than the production of the traditional bulb? Producers of fluorescent lamps tout their life-span. However, it turns out that by usual cycles of turning on and off their life-span is shortened to such an extent that their work shorter than traditional bulbs.

In this case, energy saving is just a myth. The '*energy-saving fluorescent lights*' are not popular and do not sell well. Additionally, they are worse than traditional bulbs: they provide unpleasant light which damages eyesight, are not durable, but easy to break, they turn on with a delay, and after some time their work is becoming worse. What is more, they squaw and blink, demonstrate harmful stroboscopic effect causing concentration disorders and eyesight damage, turning them on and off results in increased consumption of energy and premature wear and tear. They also distort colors showing unnatural color of the complexion and, therefore, should not be used while photographing.

The implied saving is just an illusion, taking into consideration the time needed to achieve the full value of the luminous flux. Fluorescent lights should be continuously turned on because, as it has already been mentioned, turning it on and off frequently results in its short life-span. According to the results of research conducted by independent scientific centres in the West, fluorescent lights can cause depression, hasten glaucoma, and have negative effects on people suffering from migraine and epilepsy. Discharges occurring in the fluorescent lamps generate ultraviolet light and can trigger cataract and skin cancer. These effects are accompanied with the previously described results of pollution of the environment with mercury, such as feeling, eyesight and hearing disorders, insomnia, vertigo, worse memory, kidneys damage, hypertension, bones deformation and cancer. Undoubtedly, such problems are not results of using traditional bulbs.

Another drawback of fluorescent lights is their price. Now people pay about 2 zł per one bulb, whereas it is going to be 30-40 zł per piece plus 1 zł to pay for the utilization. People are going to choose cheaper Asian fakes which do not comply with any requirements, e.g. this of the 5 mg mercury content. Companies producing sources of light are going to make a gigantic profit as a result of the currently introduced directives. The European Commission should not favour any of the producers. The case of fluorescent lamps is setting a dangerous precedent. Which dangerous and unpopular good is going to be promoted

next? GMO perhaps? Anja Weisgerber, German MP of the *European People's Party*, emphasized the fact that the decision concerning fluorescent lamps has been made by the European Commission "too fast, without social consultation, and behind both the European Parliament's and UE citizens' back". The legislative process has not been initiated.

In our opinion, the European Commission should withdraw the decision to force citizens to use fluorescent lights as quickly as possible, as it can be seen as marketing. It is widely known that misleading advertisements are punishable according to the law fighting with unfair competition. What is more, these actions are not only contrary to the UE law but also unethical. We expect the European Commission and the European Parliament to promote real ecology, and not forcing people to use harmful products in the name of empty platitudes about energy saving. As it has been already mentioned in the introduction, we expect the European Commission to accomplish strategic goals in the world of changing economies.

Fortunately, Polish society has not entirely lost the instinct of self-preservation or sense of reality which is proven by the newspaper headlines, for example "Let's buy bulbs" or "A bulb conspiracy". Officially, we are a democratic country, so why the decisions are being made without our opinions and votes? Why are not we free to choose? Apparently, there is a market economy.

To conclude, we state that forcing people to use products generating dangerous waste and violating the law concerning products containing mercury is incompatible with EU authority. There has been infringement upon the law as such a crucial issue should be considered by the European Parliament. Another charge is exposing the society to the above-mentioned health effects of the higher level of mercury in households and outside of them, together with damaging the eyesight and discomfort resulting from unhealthy lighting. The estimated amount of mercury that would be brought is 1 ton a year in Poland whereas 0.000001g Hg or its nano-molar amounts are already toxic.

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**P.S.: WHY DO WE FIGHT WITH FLUORESCENT LAMPS AND OTHER GOODS CONTAINING MERCURY? SINCE WE DO NOT WANT TO SEE THE BIRTH OF CHILDREN WITH MENTAL AND/OR PHYSICAL DISEASES.**

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