

CFL Pricing, Quality, Technology Will Continue to Improve in 2008

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Somewhere between 60 percent to 70 percent of U.S. hotels now use compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs), one lodging industry expert estimates. There is no doubt that number is going to grow.

On December 18, President Bush signed the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007. Within that bill, there is a call for the phaseout, beginning in 2012, of the incandescent bulb. It is only a matter of time before CFLs totally replace the technology invented by Thomas Edison.

Given the inevitability of CFLs, where do they stand today in regard to pricing? Quality? Technology? What can hoteliers expect in 2008?

'What is really new is that prices are plummeting,' says Dan Bornholdt, president of Upland, Calif.-based Green Suites International, a distributor of TCP SpringLamps. 'Prices for SpringLamps are under \$3 per bulb now. Three years ago, they were \$6 or \$7.'

From a quality standpoint, CFLs have been highly reliable for the last three or four years, says Ray Burger, president of Pineapple Hospitality, Saint Charles, Mo.

'We will continue to see advancements in life expectancy-closer to the 15,000-hour mark,' says Burger, who sells energy-efficient CFLs from GE Lighting. 'The product keeps getting smaller, but is maintaining the same quality.'

Smaller is better, says John George, marketing manager for CFLs for Osram Sylvania, Danvers, Mass. Osram Sylvania recently introduced the micro-mini Twist, what it calls 'the smallest CFL on the market.' Twist is available in 13-, 20- and 23-watt models and is designed to replace 60-, 75- and 100-watt incandescent lamps. Twist offers a rated lamp life of 12,000 hours. The micro-mini measures 3.7 inches long, an inch shorter than a standard incandescent lamp, and features a color temperature of 3,000 Kelvin (K) and instant-on capabilities.

CFLs Becoming Less Hazardous

'CFLs are becoming even more environmentally friendly,' says Cameron Clark, merchant in the lighting category for San Diego-based HD Supply Facilities Maintenance, which sells a variety of fluorescent lighting products. 'They are being made with less mercury and less lead. Many of the CFLs that meet Europe's stringent Reduction of Hazardous Substance (RoHS) requirements will start making their way into the U.S. market. Hotels that use these will be able to distinguish themselves as being 'more green.''

Experts agree that while the technology to add dimmability to CFLs is improving, it is not yet where it needs to be.

'There are dimmable CFLs, but they do not perform even close to their incandescent counterparts,' HD Supply Facilities Maintenance's Clark says. 'Until they do, they will not be widely used or accepted. Manufacturers are continually looking for opportunities to improve their products in this regard, and some have delayed the introduction of new dimmable products until they are completely satisfied they will meet end user expectations. They also recognize that it is the greatest opportunity for growth.'

'Dimmability is still a barrier to overcome,' Osram Sylvania's George says. 'But every generation of products gets better. We have some products that are dimmable.'

Lamps that offer instant-on capability, like Osram Sylvania's Twist bulb, are more available today even though, as Clark says, 'CFLs still have a stigma of being too dim' because of the fact that many do not reach full brightness right away.

Green Suites' Burger says CFLs are now comparable to incandescents in regard to color quality. 'Color-rendering index (CRI) quality has gone up in recent years,' he says. 'They are all over 90 now and comparable to incandescents.' The best rating a lamp can have on the CRI scale of zero to 100 is 100.

New Three-Way Bulb Introduced

For those hotels that still have three-way fixtures, Alsip, Ill.-based Litetronics International Inc. recently introduced Spiral-Lite, a three-way CFL that offers the light output equivalent of a 50/100/150-watt incandescent lamp. Spiral-Lite provides up to 75 percent in energy savings and has a rated life of 10,000 hours.

Especially in guestroom applications, Pineapple Hospitality's Burger says that more light is better than less light, especially at the bedside. Poor lighting is one of the best ways to negatively impact guest satisfaction.

'Hotels that have 100-watt incandescents in the guestroom will retrofit with a 20-watt CFL,' Burger says. 'I recommend using at least a 23- or 32-watt CFL. A 32-watt provides light equivalent to a 125-watt incandescent.'

Mixing and matching CFLs is fine as long as the CRI reading is the same. Look at the package the CFL comes in. It will tell you the color temperature-2700K, for example. If you have questions about how to purchase CFLs, seek out an expert.

'Get them from a hotel supplier that truly understands the industry,' Green Suites' Bornholdt says. 'There are a lot of cheap products out there and you don't want to mess with guests. You want to purchase the appropriate lamp for the right area.'

HD Supply Facilities Maintenance's Clark recommends taking a look at bulb life, lumen ratings and bulb shape.

'CFLs vary in life hours from 6,000 to 15,000,' he says. 'If you are comparing by price, make sure it is apples to apples. A lot of packaging will say a CFL is a '100-watt replacement,' but may only produce 1,600 lumens. Is that really enough light? Guest satisfaction scores are driving some hotels to use lamps with a minimum of 1,850 lumens. Twist shapes are best in shaded table, floor, or bedside fixtures. Because they do not have a cover over the tubes, they produce the most light.'

CFLs today offer so much upside-environmental benefits, long life, energy savings, and time and cost savings-that it is difficult to make an argument against using them.

'At this point in time, I cannot name any applications where they are not a good fit, except possibly some decorative lighting like chandeliers,' Pineapple Hospitality's Burger says. 'It would be hard to say you are a green hotel if you are not using CFLs.'

This article first appeared on the Green Lodging News website. To sign up to receive the weekly Green Lodging News newsletter, go to www.greenlodgingnews.com. Glenn Hasek can be reached at greenlodgingnews@aol.com.

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