

Our Ref: F0154167

Mr Iain McGillivray

request-30641-6a4d242d@whatdotheyknow.com

If telephoning ask for:  
Kathryn Farvolden

15 April 2010

Dear Mr McGillivray

## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Thank you for your recent email, received by us on 17 March 2010, in which you asked for the following information:

- 1. What measures if any has SEPA put in place to prevent environmental mercury contamination from disposal of fluorescent "energy saving" light bulbs?*
- 2. Have any studies been conducted into the levels of mercury present in landfill sites and surrounding areas (as well as other locations) from such sources as discarded energy saving light bulbs?*
- 3. Has an assessment been conducted by SEPA into the risk of contamination of public water supplies, groundwater, atmosphere and ecological systems from disposal of energy saving light bulbs, taking into account likely future increase in domestic use of these bulbs?*
- 4. Has SEPA conducted any research into the direct health effects of use of energy saving light bulbs (For example claims that they emit RF radiation or "dirty electricity" that can lead to migraines, fatigue, eye strain, skin irritation and other symptoms)?*
- 5. What facilities exist in Scotland for the proper disposal of energy saving light bulbs to prevent mercury contamination?*

We have applied the exemption under Section 39(2) of the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 as we have determined that the information sought in your request is environmental information. We are therefore handling your request under the terms of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004. (EIRs)

We passed your enquiry to our waste policy team who have provided the following information:

- SEPA has not put measures in place to specifically target and prevent environmental contamination from energy saving light bulbs. A comprehensive package of existing environmental controls (e.g. special waste controls; licence conditions in permits; etc.) is designed to protect the environment from a range of disposal activities, not just those related to energy saving light bulbs. These are regarded as sufficient. Currently any permitted sites receiving this waste stream, whether separately collected or within mixed waste collections, would have sufficient controls applied through the permit/licence to prevent pollution of the environment (e.g. secure storage and handling conditions; impermeable surfaces; etc.).
- SEPA has not conducted or commissioned any study which looks specifically at mercury levels present in landfill sites from specific sources such as energy saving light bulbs.



Chairman  
David Sigsworth

Chief Executive  
Dr Campbell Gemmill

### Corporate Office

Erskine Court, Castle Business Park, Stirling FK9 4TR  
tel 01786 457700 fax 01786 446885  
[www.sepa.org.uk](http://www.sepa.org.uk)

Release of the specified information is therefore excepted under Regulation 10(4)(a) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs). The wording of is reproduced below for your reference:

*10(4) A Scottish public authority may refuse to make environmental information available to the extent that (a) it does not hold the information when an applicant's request is received.*

However, all permitted landfill sites have groundwater monitoring conditions. There is currently no evidence to suggest that there are any increased mercury levels in groundwater due to the landfilling activities.

3. As previously indicated, there is no evidence of mercury contamination arising from permitted landfills. SEPA has therefore had no reason to not conduct an assessment of the risk of contamination of public water supplies, groundwater, atmosphere and ecological systems from the disposal of energy saving light bulbs.

Release of the specified information is therefore excepted under Regulation 10(4)(a) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs). The wording of is reproduced below for your reference:

*10(4) A Scottish public authority may refuse to make environmental information available to the extent that (a) it does not hold the information when an applicant's request is received.*

SEPA is also confident that existing environmental controls (as indicated in response to Question 1 above) are sufficient to protect the environment. Any disposal of energy saving light bulbs will be controlled through permit conditions to mitigate against any such risk.

4. SEPA do not carry out research into direct health effects such as those you identified.

Release of the specified information is therefore excepted under Regulation 10(4)(a) of the Environmental Information (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (EIRs). The wording of is reproduced below for your reference:

*10(4) A Scottish public authority may refuse to make environmental information available to the extent that (a) it does not hold the information when an applicant's request is received.*

I would suggest that you contact Health Protection Scotland ([www.hps.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk)), who may be able to answer your questions in this regard.

5. At present, there are no authorised sites in Scotland for the treatment and recycling of separately collected energy saving light bulbs. This means that any separately collected energy saving bulbs are sent to England for treatment and recycling. Directive 2002/96/EC on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment ("WEEE") (the "WEEE Directive") sets standards for the treatment, recycling and recovery of WEEE and makes producers of WEEE responsible for financing these activities. Consequently, in the UK, systems have been put into place to allow takeback facilities for the separate collection of WEEE (including lighting equipment) and ensuring it goes for recycling/recovery. It is possible that

energy saving light bulbs may end up in mixed waste collections. If the waste is disposed of in landfills, SEPA is content that the existing provisions in the Landfill (Scotland) Regulations 2003 provide a high level of environmental protection from such activities.

If you are not satisfied with our response, you have up until 10 June 2010 to request a formal review from SEPA at:

Access to Information  
SEPA Corporate Office  
Erskine Court  
Castle Business Park  
STIRLING  
FK9 4TR  
Email: [foi@sepa.org.uk](mailto:foi@sepa.org.uk)

If you are still not satisfied, you can appeal to the Scottish Information Commissioner.

Scottish Information Commissioner  
Kinburn Castle  
Doubledykes Road  
St Andrews  
Fife  
KY16 9DS  
Telephone: 01334 464610  
Fax: 01334 464611  
e-mail: [enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info](mailto:enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info)

Your unique reference number is F0154167. Please quote this in any future contact with us about your request.

If you have any queries in the meantime, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

*Kathryn Farvolden*

**Kathryn Farvolden**  
Access to Information Co-ordinator

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