

# If Thomas Edison was alive today

By Linda Bowen, NC

When Thomas Edison finally got the light bulb right in 1879 he commented that “We now know a thousand ways not to build a light bulb”. He probably couldn’t have imagined that his one “right” way could, in our age of increasing concern for energy savings and the environment, also be considered “wrong”.

As we scramble to secure new energy sources, and use what we have more efficiently, common sense, economics, and new environmentally-friendly energy savings measures may, at last, spell the end of Edison’s basic filament light bulb. How quickly this happens largely depends on what consumers decide works best for them in their homes and businesses.

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) are being pushed as the environmental lighting superhero of the day, but are they really? They have their downside too, namely the mercury they contain. Although the amount in each bulb is minuscule, if most of the world starts using CFLs, just how much mercury does that represent? And what happens if all that mercury isn’t disposed of properly? Some studies even suggest that because CFLs are “cool” lights – i.e. they don’t shed heat – they may lead to higher heating bills. Is it possible that the trusty old, incandescent “hot” bulb wasn’t so bad after all?

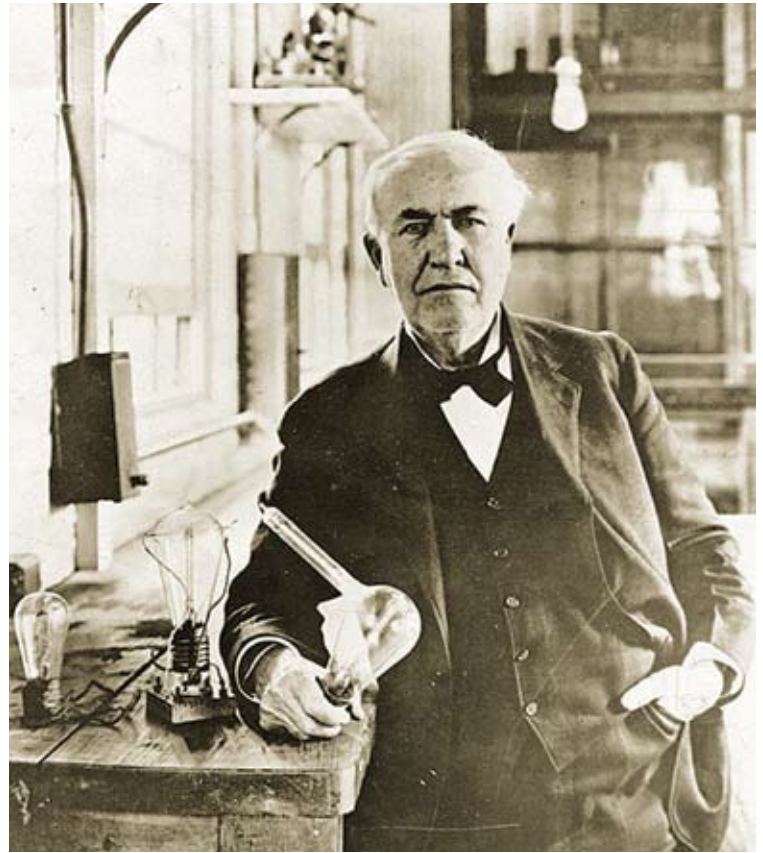
Even with the debate, CFLs still look like the best choice for “straight” energy savings, since they use 75% less energy than incandescent bulbs, and CFL technology is improving rapidly in terms of light quality, bright-

ness and colour. LED technology is also evolving, so the next generation of lighting choices should mean a much brighter outlook for our world and our pocketbooks.

So what should you do right now? Since lighting may represent as much as 30% of your energy bill, there are practical ways to reduce your lighting costs, regardless of the kind of light bulb you use:

## At home:

- Outside your home, use solar lighting whenever and wherever possible – after the initial purchase cost, solar lights run for free!
- Reduce the number of bulbs in your multi-bulb fixtures – bathroom vanities, track lighting and so forth. Experiment with how much light you really need vs. how much is just there because of all the fixtures blazing away. If you don’t like the look of empty sockets or unlit bulbs, use lower wattage bulbs instead – it’s amazing how much we “over-light” our rooms.
- Use LED plug-in lights for hallways and areas that require continuous lighting – the savings will really add up, and you won’t have to nag



the kids to keep turning off the lights.

- Install dimmer switches or sensors in high traffic areas that require frequent lighting – bathrooms, kitchens, hallways, and entrances – just make sure to choose a bulb that’s compatible with a dimmer or sensor, since not all CFLs or halogens will work with them.
- For help in choosing the right bulb for the right fixture, refer to the energy star chart at [http://www.energystar.gov/ia/products/lighting/cfls/downloads/How\\_To\\_Choose\\_FINAL\\_VERTICAL.pdf](http://www.energystar.gov/ia/products/lighting/cfls/downloads/How_To_Choose_FINAL_VERTICAL.pdf)

- Maximize natural lighting: clear blocked windows and shut off lights or install daylight sensors in over-lit areas.
- Replace old T8, T10 and T12 fluorescent lights with the new LED T8 and T12 lights, which works with most existing ballasts, are eligible for rebates by most Canadian power companies, and offer the following benefits: a ten-year life, no mercury, no lead, no phosphor powder, and no flicker. They are also available as full spectrum lights.

In the end, we all need to look at the information that’s out there, do our homework, and weigh the choices and options against our own personal needs and circumstances. There are great options to look at that can both save money and lighten our footprint on the planet. Just doing something, even a little change, can make a big difference over time.

## In your business:

- Install an LED exit light
- Make it a store policy to turn off lights in low use (non-public) areas like storage rooms and bathrooms. Another option would be to install light sensors.



Linda Bowen, NC

With over 25 years in the natural health industry, including hosting a daily radio show and TV segments, Linda’s passion is the impact our environment has on our health. As a green consultant, she now helps individuals and corporations find solutions that support our health and the future of our planet.