

PCB-Containing Fluorescent Lamp Ballasts

What are PCBs?

Polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, are a group of industrial chemicals that were widely used before 1979 as insulators in electrical equipment. Use and disposal of PCBs is federally regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Toxic Substances and Control Act (TSCA).

How can I tell if a ballast manufactured by Robertson Worldwide contains PCBs?

All high-power-factor fluorescent lamp ballasts manufactured by Robertson Worldwide prior to May 1977 include a small metal capacitor (an electronic device used to store an electrical charge) that contains approximately 10 grams of PCB fluid. The capacitors in our fluorescent lamp ballasts manufactured after January 1, 1979, do not contain PCBs. Ballasts manufactured between May 1, 1977 and January 1, 1979, may include either type of capacitor. All other fluorescent ballasts manufactured after January 1, 1979, do not contain PCBs.

How do I dispose of a PCB-containing fluorescent lamp ballast?

PCB-containing ballasts may be restricted from disposal in a normal landfill. If disposal is restricted, please go to www.lamprecycle.org for a list of national lamp and ballast recyclers. Under federal regulations, leaking PCB-containing ballasts may not be disposed of in a landfill; they must be disposed of or recycled in an approved facility. However, it is unusual for a capacitor to leak PCBs. Even if the ballast overheats and leaks the potting compound (a black tar-like substance used to protect the capacitor), the PCB-containing capacitor itself usually will not leak.

Capacitors containing less than 3 pounds of PCB are exempted by the EPA from federal regulations, and small numbers of them may be disposed of in a sanitary landfill. The capacitors included in Robertson Worldwide fluorescent ballasts are well below this limit. Therefore, intact non-leaking ballasts may be sent to such landfills, provided there are no state or local regulations to the contrary. Some states completely ban the disposal of PCB-containing ballasts in landfills, or limit ballast disposal to small quantities.

The potting compound used to protect the capacitors in these ballasts is a mixture of asphalt and sand. Test data on some ballasts indicates that the potting compound may contain low levels of PCBs in the asphalt. If the potting compound contains greater than 50 PCB parts per million (ppm), ballasts must be disposed of or recycled in an approved facility. If more than a pound (454 grams) of PCB fluid is released within a 24-hour period into the environment, the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) requires that you notify the EPA National Response Center. If you are disposing of large numbers of PCB-containing ballasts, disposal or recycling in an approved facility is strongly recommended.