

The New York Times

Green

A Blog About Energy and the Environment

SEPTEMBER 23, 2010, 3:48 PM

The Battle of the Bulbs

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Three House Republicans, Joe Barton and Michael Burgess of Texas and Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, have [introduced the Better Use of Light Bulbs Act](#), which would repeal [the section](#) of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 that sets minimum energy efficiency standards for light bulbs and would effectively phase out most ordinary incandescents.

While the new standards won't take effect until 2012, the authors argue that they are having a negative impact.

Associated Press An energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulb.

Specifically, they say the standards have led lighting companies to close several incandescent light bulb factories in the United States and send jobs overseas — particularly to China, where most compact fluorescent light bulbs, which are more efficient than incandescents, are manufactured.

Compact fluorescents are likely to be the cheapest bulbs on store shelves after retailers stop selling ordinary incandescents.

“The unanticipated consequences of the '07 act — Washington-mandated layoffs in the middle of a desperate recession — is one of the many examples of what happens when politicians and activists think they know better than consumers and workers,” Mr. Barton, the ranking member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said in a statement. “Washington is making too many decisions that are better left to people who work for their own paychecks and earn their own living.”

Mr. Barton and his colleagues cite [the recent closing](#) of a General Electric incandescent factory in Winchester, Va., where 200 workers lost their jobs, as an example of how the light bulb standards are harming American workers.

But proponents of the energy law say that such closings were already set into motion before the law was passed by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush in December 2007. Before the law's passage, General Electric announced it was cutting jobs in its lighting division in response to a consumer shift toward more energy-efficient fluorescent products.

“It's really consumer buying patterns,” James Campbell of G.E.'s consumer and industrial unit [said in a 2007 interview](#). “We're really trying to be aggressive here and take the lead,

restructuring plants and right-sizing ourselves to leverage what we see in the market.”

The [National Electrical Manufacturers Association](#), a trade group that represents American lighting companies, said that the market for standard incandescent bulbs had declined 50 percent over the last five years.

But even though a significant number of people are making the switch to more efficient light bulbs, they are still in the minority. And some consumers who have tried compact fluorescents **were disappointed** by their performance and switched back.

Although they cost more to use in the long run, incandescents remain still the go-to choice for most Americans, many note.

“Despite the growing sales of energy-saving C.F.L.’s, the reality is three out of every four sockets in the U.S. still contain the least efficient bulb available on the market, the 100-year-old incandescent bulb,” said Noah Horowitz, a senior scientist with the Natural Resources Defense Council. “The standards were needed to help make sure that every socket in the U.S. contained an energy-saving bulb, thereby preventing the need to build 30 large power plants and all the pollution that they generate.”

Mr. Horowitz and others suggest that the standards have actually prompted the development of more efficient, compliant versions.

Still, critics question why more of the new, energy-saving bulbs aren’t being manufactured in the United States.

“Why not convert the Winchester plant to produce C.F.L.’s?” said Lisa Miller, Mr. Barton’s spokeswoman.

Janice Fraser, a communications manager for the G.E. appliances and lighting division, said the company did study the feasibility of retooling an incandescent factory and found that it was cost-prohibitive because of the high cost of manufacturing in the United States.

“We would have to invest a minimum of \$40 million to retrofit a plant to make the bulbs on top of an already high cost structure,” she said. “This would drive up production costs and make the selling price of G.E. C.F.L.’s, at minimum, 50 percent higher than bulbs sold by competitors.”

Ms. Fraser said the company was creating some energy-efficient lighting manufacturing jobs in the United States, for example, by investing \$60 million in G.E.’s lighting factory in Bucyrus, Ohio. The money is being used to expand production of linear fluorescent lamps, and 135 new positions were added, she said.

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