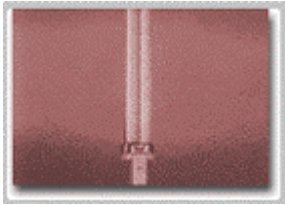


WARNING ABOUT CFLS - COMPACT LIGHTS, LONG STORY

Low cost compact florescent lamps (CFLs) have gained easy access into the Indian market under the liberalised environment. Although the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has laid down certain specifications for Indian and foreign manufacturers, these are not enforced for foreign products, resulting in Indian consumers getting substandard products and Indian manufacturers being subject to unfair competition. CFLs are either self-ballasted (where the ballast is integrated with the tube) and can fit into any holder used for the normal incandescent bulbs or non-retrofit type (where the tube and the ballast are separate and connected with wires) and require specially designed holders. The USP of CFLs over the regular bulbs is its low power consumption. CFLs of a lower wattage are designed to give the same light as an incandescent lamp of higher wattage due to its advanced technology.

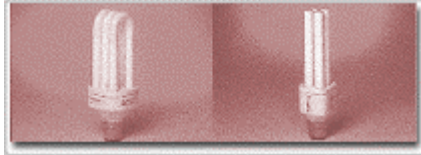


CFLs consume lower power than regular bulbs to give the same light due to their advanced technology

Do the foreign-made CFLs meet this expectation? Consumer Education Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad tested a random sample of 23 foreign-made self-ballasted CFLs available in the Indian market. The lamps were of different wattage, ranging from 11W to 28W. Their test results, published in their bimonthly magazine Insight, reveal a stark contrast between manufacturers' claims and actual performance and durability of CFLs. Although branded CFLs are manufactured and sold in India and are subject to certain quality control, they are relatively more expensive than the foreign CFLs, whose price ranges from Rs 35 to Rs 250. Non-Indian brands are distinguished by the absence of the 'Made in India' mark or are often without any country identification. The sellers of foreign-made CFLs do not offer any guarantee or warranty and rarely provide proof of purchase.

BIS specifications are not enforced on foreign products, resulting in consumers getting substandard devices

BIS is developing performance standards for CFLs. In the absence of Indian standards, the performance of the CFLs were checked against the standards set by the International Electro-technical Commission (IEC) of Europe, the American National Standard Institute (ANSI) and the Illumination Engineering Society of North America (IESNA). Historically, Indian standards have been closer to these international standards. According to IEC, CFLs should have clear and durable markings of such details as the rated voltage, luminous flux, wattage, frequency, the lamp current, name of manufacturer and information on special conditions or restrictions to be observed in operating the lamp. None of the brands had all the necessary information on the label. Only Yong Hui, both 11W and 15W, gave information on lamp current on its carton. No other brand except Gajttron and Gajt-lite had the light output marked on them. Steel-1 and Asaram did not mention the rated frequency. Lite-On, Cata, Kapsun, Steel-1, Golden Dragon, White Dolphin and Asaram did not mention any special conditions or restrictions on operating the lamp.



CERC tested samples of foreign-made, self-ballasted CFLs, ranging from 11W to 28W, available in the Indian market. None of them met the essential labelling requirements, and few met manufacturers own claims of performance

All CFLs display a certain wattage, indicating the power they consume. When lamps consume more power than what is stated the consumer ends up spending more than what he had bargained for. That is why the IEC requires that the actual wattage of CFLs, when measured must not exceed 115 per cent of that marked wattage. For instance, if a lamp carries the 15W mark, its actual wattage must not be more than 17.25W.

All foreign-made CFLs revealed wattage consumed to be much below the wattage marked on the product, the difference ranging from 91 to just 20 per cent of the wattage marked. For instance, one sample of 18W Asaram consumed only 3.75 W. When the lamps consume less wattage than that marked on the product; the lamps would give less light than what is promised.

How Much Light

CFL cartons highlight a comparison of CFL light against normal incandescent bulbs. They explain how they use less power but provide the same light. IEC requires that the light given out by a CFL must not be less than 90 per cent of that marked on the label. But other than Gujtron and Gujlite, none of the brands had the information on light output marked on them. International reference methods state that in such a case the light output required to be given out by a lamp is based on the wattage marked on it. For example, a lamp marked 11W should give light in the range of 540-580 lumens, a 15W lamp should give 760 to 900 lumens and so on.

The fact that so many lamps are entering the market means there are too many unformed buyers

All the brands failed in the test for light output. The light given out by the various brands ranged from as low as 13.6 to 88.9 per cent of that required. One sample each of Yonghui 11W and Samson were exceptions, giving out 93.5 and 99.2 per cent respectively of the light output required. Normally, CFL cartons are marked with equivalent incandescent wattage to help a consumer select a suitable CFL for replacement of an incandescent bulb. For example, manufacturers of 18W CFLs claim on their cartons to give the same light as a 100W incandescent lamp. So consumers are led to believe that they would save 82W per hour by replacing their current 100W incandescent with an 18W CFL. But in reality, an 18W CFL is giving the light equivalent to a 25W incandescent only. Hence, in spite of paying at least Rs 35 for the CFL (considering the least priced CFL), instead of Rs 10 for an incandescent, they have not got the desired light.