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# A Boom in Bulbs

By Thomas J. Sheeran  
 Associated Press

Consumers long resisted compact fluorescents. But rising prices have held demand surge.

Aurora, Ohio- Julie Grassley wanted to do something for the environment and save money, so she replaced many of her Edison inspired incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent lamps, which are enjoying robust growth in a high-cost energy era.

Grassley has heard all the gripes on fluorescent: slow to light up, not very bright and expensive. She doesn't buy those arguments anymore.

"They are bright and they come right on," said the 37-year old resident of nearby Stow, Ohio. "Initially they are more expensive, but they last seven to ten years longer."

The lighting industry has created a brighter, cheaper compact fluorescent lamps, or CFLs, that seem to be catching on among homeowners determined to trim high energy expenses. CFL use has climbed from 2.3 per cent of the bulb market in 1999 to 5.6 per cent this year.

The surge in demand has meant a boom for CFL makers, from lighting bigwigs General Electric Co., Philips Lighting and Osram Sylvania to a smaller Ohio company, Technical Consumer Products Inc.

GE's headquarters is located in Stamford, Conn.

Through only a fraction of the size of its competitors, Technical Consumer Products, with 103 employees at its suburban Cleveland headquarters and 7,000 at its manufacturing location in the Shanghai, China, area, has increased its sales more than fivefold since 2000 to \$115 million (U.S.) last year and claims 40 per cent of the CFL market, in large part from good shelf exposure at Home Depot. TCP's president, Ellis Yan, has bet his career on educating Americans to use more CFLs. He thinks CFLs' bulb market share can grow to 10 per cent or 12 per cent in three to five years.

Yan said that biggest challenge in getting people to by CFLs instead of regular bulbs is a century old habit: people will buy an incandescent bulb with out thinking.

"My competition is 6 feet underground – Thomas Edison," Yan said.

Technical Consumer Products, whose CFLs are sold under the Commercial Electric and DuraBright labels, repeatedly emphasize savings on its packages: "This package saves you \$118 in energy cost per bulb," "Lasts 7 years guaranteed," and "Lasts 8 times longer than standard bulbs."



Ellis Yan, president and CEO, Technical Consumer Products Inc.

**Yan's company was ranked by the U.S. government among the top five producers of Energy Star-rated CFLs...**

CFL prices have dipped from \$10 or \$15 to the \$5 dollar range, even less in bulk, but that's still more than an incandescent bulb that can be had for 25 cents.

Technical Consumer Products rode the first wave of CFL buying in the 1990s, as environmentally conscious California led the way amid blackout fears. But the trend stalled with the passing of each crisis.

"This time it's totally different," said Yan, who thinks Americans have become so saturated with talk of high energy prices, primarily oil, that they are ready to make a move to CFLs.

Lighting accounts for nearly 20 per cent of electricity costs, with the average home having more than 30 lights fixtures.

Yan's company was ranked by the U.S. government among the top five producers of Energy Star-rated CFLs along with GE, Phillips Lighting, Osram Sylvania and Feit Electric.

Sales spurt when talk of a power shortage emerges or gasoline prices spike.

"You can tie events to the upsurge in compact fluorescents," said Steven Goldmacher, a Philips spokesman. "Any issue with a brownout or blackout, sales go up."

Peter Morante, director of energy programs at the Lighting Research Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., said the government's Energy Star ratings have given skeptical consumers confidence that CFLs will perform as advertised. Still, predicted it might be another decade before CFLs rival incandescent bulb sales.

According to a joint U.S. Energy Department-Environmental Protection Agency project to promote energy efficiency, CFLs that qualify for an Energy Star rating use one third of the energy of standard bulbs, last at least six times longer and come with a minimum two-year warranty.

In addition, the CFLs provide as much light as an incandescent bulb, while using fewer watts, and will reduce pollution emissions and save \$25 over the life of the bulb.

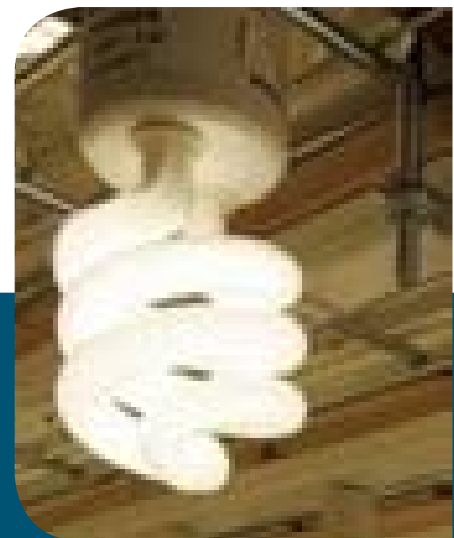
Dennis Plank, 53, a Sierra Club environmental activist who uses CFLs in his Cleveland duplex, expects to save money but isn't convinced a CFL is bright enough.

Still, "They save energy. They last longer. It's better for the environment and cuts down on landfills," Plank said.

Jim Owen, spokesman for the Edison Electric Institute, a Washington-based trade group for investor owned electronic utilities, thinks Edison would approve of the lighting industry's dive to save energy.

"Customers are clearly eager to find ways to conserve energy and use it more efficiently," Owen said.

"If Thomas Edison were alive today, he too would be working on this issue, undoubtedly burning the midnight oil in his lab to devise new and even more efficient ways to conserve the very product whose modern use he first helped pioneer... '85" He added. ■



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