

The Fluorescent Lighting Crisis: Part I: Background, Overview and Action

Opinion by Joan Hudson-Miller, President, LRS Large Print and NAASLN Board Member

Has fluorescent lighting been a problem for any of the individuals you serve in your professional capacity? Or what about friends, family, even yourself? In all the disciplines addressing visual perception and disabilities, learning disabilities, emotional, behavioral, and psychological problems, there has been a growing awareness of the negative effect that fluorescent lighting can have on individuals with these problems.

Now a coalition of industrialists, environmentalists, and energy specialists is banding together to try to eliminate the incandescent light bulb. Legislation that has been proposed in California, Canada, and Australia focuses solely on energy and environmental concerns. And while arguments are being made that mercury content in fluorescent lighting may cause even more environmental problems, few are addressing this issue as it affects persons with visual concerns that are exacerbated by fluorescent lighting. No doubt about it, this legislation will hurt people.

Fluorescent sensitivity can greatly exaggerate pre-existing conditions and interfere with treatment. If the fluorescent problem is considered, addressed, and treated first, then the primary problem can be treated. Too often, however, because of a lack of awareness, the effects of fluorescent lighting are not taken into consideration in IEPs or clinical diagnoses. Too often, especially in the classroom and work environment, children and adults put up with or accept as “normal” headaches, stress, weariness, squinting, and even blurred print. The remedy is often “take two aspirin and get more sleep”.

According to Helen L. Irlen, Executive Director of The Irlen Institute, nearly one-quarter of the world’s population will suffer negative physical effects if this legislation is allowed to pass. For this portion of the population, fluorescent light triggers headaches, migraines, stomach aches, fatigue, eye strain, anxiety, and irritability. Fluorescent lights can also negatively impact the immune system, literally making people sick.

I should know because I was one of the 25% percent and didn’t even know it. I lived with this for more than 50 years, 16 of which were spent in the classroom and a good percentage of the rest in indoor work environments, all of which had fluorescent lighting. I was lucky to have met Helen Irlen in a professional capacity. In learning about the Irlen Syndrome and her pioneering work with perceptual problems and light sensitivity, I discovered that there was a simple solution that could remove all my debilitating symptoms. Ideally, I should read and work only in environments using low-intensity incandescent lighting. Since this was impossible, I explored the use of colored overlays or filters with the correct

combination of shades of color. The latter, while the best solution, involves the cost of evaluations and tinting of eyeglass lenses or contacts.

But let's be realistic. Purchasing and wearing eyeglasses with the correct color tints may not be practical or feasible for the majority of that 25 percent of the population who experience adverse effects from fluorescent lighting. So what can be done right now for these individuals?

We need educate ourselves and others. And we need to advocate. While we need to learn more about the properties of fluorescent and other lighting options as well as their environmental impacts, our first priority is to take immediate action. Part II of this article, which will be in the next issue of the NAASLN membership News and Views, will cover these issues.

We must ensure that there is no ban on incandescent lighting until the impact on individuals and our environment is fully understood and taken into consideration. As with so many "crisis" issues like global warming, the short-term quick fix is not the long term solution, and it can cause more problems than it solves. This appears to be the case with fluorescent lighting.

An easy step toward halting this misguided full ban on incandescent lighting is to sign the Irlen Institute Petition (<http://irlen.com/index.php?s=news>) The Irlen Institute has taken the lead with this petition and suggests concrete ideas on making your views known to your community and your legislators. To learn more go to www.irlen.com

The Irlen Institute suggests that In addition to the petition, send emails with your personal story to your legislatures and to the media, such as Oprah (www.oprah.com).The Canadian Broadcast Company (CBC) offers a search engine at www.cbc.ca. Type in 'incandescent' in 'search cbc'. A number of articles will appear. At the end of each article is an option to submit feedback. A form will come up. On it are options to 1. Comment. 2. Suggest a story. 3. Tell your story.

In Canada, you may contact Onechange.org at porchlight@onechange.org; Kamloops MP Betty Hinton at hintob1@parl.gc.ca, NDP MP Paul Dewar at dewarp@parl.gc.ca, or your local MP, whose email may be found by using your favorite search engine.

In Australia, send your emails to the Australian Environment Minister, Malcolm Turnbull.

We can make a difference!

An example of how effect this type of advocacy can be has just been proven with the very recent blockage of a pending California Assembly bill AB 722, for which

the Assembly Committee was soliciting comments. Through the efforts of the Irlen Institute, the committee received the above petition with over 900 signatures, plus individual letters, calls and emails.

We end Part I with a personal note from Helen L. Irlen, Executive Director, Irlen Institute International

We may have won the battle but not the war. We still need your help since the governments of Canada, Australia, and possibly the U.S. are still considering legislation to ban the sales of incandescent light bulbs. However, our success in California has shown that your emails and petitions can make a difference!

We all have to work together to get our voices heard. So please continue to sign our petition online to help prevent the ban on incandescent light bulbs. Go to www.irlen.com. Tell your family, friends, and neighbors. Send the petition link to everyone you know.

We appreciate everything you are doing to make the world know that there are people who are bothered by fluorescent lighting. We need to continue educating and spreading the word. Together we can make a difference.

|