

## A brighter idea? Converting fluorescent or neon signs to energy-efficient LED illumination

Depending on the type of your interior or exterior lighted sign, it may very well pay to update its illumination to energy-efficient light-emitting diodes or LEDs. Thousands have found the value in retrofitting, including one nationwide chain of thousands of convenience stores. But is it right for you? Here are some considerations.



### LED advantages over fluorescent lighting

Some estimate that illumination via light-emitting diodes over fluorescent bulbs can reduce sign maintenance and energy costs by up to 80 percent.

Begin by considering the expenses of repairs. As solid-state devices with no moving parts, filaments or glass, LEDs are remarkably durable and maintenance-free. Not so with fluorescent bulbs. They are significantly more fragile than LEDs—making them prone to breakage during transportation and installation or when exposed to strong winds or heavy storms.

While the cost of a replacement fluorescent light is minimal, the sign owner must often not only pay for a service call and perhaps a bucket truck, but also for the environmentally safe disposal of the bulb, which contains toxic mercury. In the end, the expense of replacing just a single broken or burned-out fluorescent bulb can reach a significant sum!

Then, too, there are factors including energy use, longevity and operating temperatures—all of which favor light-emitting diodes over fluorescent lights.

LEDs consume just over one-third the electricity of fluorescent bulbs. They enjoy a lifespan that's typically over five times as long. And their heat emissions are about two-thirds less, which is something to consider if you're air conditioning an indoor space. Of course, all that's not to mention an LED's start-up is instant, unlike the maddeningly slow beginning flicker of a fluorescent light.

### Retrofitting from neon to LED illumination

Businesses or organizations with signage that's illuminated by neon lighting will find many of the same advantages as those transitioning from fluorescent bulbs to LEDs.

As mentioned, light-emitting diodes are extremely durable

and able to withstand shock and vibration. In contrast, neon, which is encased in glass, breaks relatively easily during transportation and installation, and is subject to the same hazards of wind and weather as fluorescent bulbs.

Disposal, too, may be a concern. Neon signs contain mercury, which is hazardous to the environment.

Then there's energy use, which favors light-emitting diodes hands down. LEDs have a lifetime energy savings of up to 40 percent over neon!

One other factor gives the nod to light-emitting diodes over neon, and that's cold-weather performance. LED modules stay brighter in cold weather, where neon sign brightness can drop dramatically when temperatures fall below 35 degrees Fahrenheit, thereby negating much of the value in illuminating your sign in the first place.

### Making the switch: Is it the right move for you?

Retrofitting your fluorescent or neon sign to energy-efficient and eco-friendly LEDs will depend on a number of factors. How many signs do you have? Is the signage located indoors or out? Is it illuminated at all hours, or only when it's dark or during times when your facility is open? Are there state laws that apply to the sign's energy use or environmental impact?

Finally, how old is your fluorescent or neon sign? Would a fresh replacement sign with a totally updated design in addition to efficient light-emitting diodes make more sense than a retrofit? Or is your current sign a relatively recent investment with a style that's still relevant?

For answers to these questions, sit down with an experienced signage provider to assess the advantages of one option vs. the other. You may just find that when it comes to illuminated signage, LEDs are indeed a brighter idea!

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