

latimes.com/business/la-fi-lightbulb3-2009oct03,0,3065254.story

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TECH TRENDS

\$39.95 for an energy-efficient light bulb? It's a deal, says maker Lemnis Lighting

The Pharox60 LED lasts longer and ends up saving more money, the Dutch company says. Getting people in the U.S. to buy it is the challenge.

By Todd Woody

October 3, 2009

Would you pay \$39.95 for a light bulb?

Didn't think so. But what if it used 90% less electricity than a standard incandescent bulb, cut greenhouse gas emissions and saved you about \$280 over its 25-year life span?

That's the challenge facing Dutch start-up Lemnis Lighting, which on Friday began selling the American version of what apparently is the world's first dimmable LED bulb compatible with home light fixtures.

LEDs -- light-emitting diodes -- are semiconductors that glow and are considered one of the great hopes for slashing carbon emissions from lighting, which consumes about 19% of energy production worldwide.

Lemnis says its Pharox60 LED lasts six times as long as an energy-efficient compact fluorescent light bulb. And unlike CFLs, LEDs don't contain toxic mercury.

Most often found in electronics equipment or in commercial lighting, LEDs tend to cast a cold light. Lemnis founder Warner Philips said the start-up spent considerable effort to engineer its 6-watt bulb to give off the warm white glow of a 60-watt incandescent.

"The final challenge is, how do you get people to understand that \$40 for a light bulb is not expensive?" he said. "From Day One, they start to save money. The energy savings over the bulb's lifetime vastly exceed its cost."

Philips said one solution would be for utilities to finance the cost of swapping a home's incandescent bulbs for LEDs and add a fee to customers' monthly bills. The utilities would profit if lower electricity demand enables them to avoid the expense of building power plants, he said.

And that \$39.95 price? That's a special offer -- the bulb retails for \$49.95 -- good until Dec. 31. As production ramps up, Philips expects the price of the bulbs to fall.

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