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Light industry has bright future

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How much has the light bulb changed in the past 150 years or so? And what will it look like tomorrow?

That is what some of lighting's top luminaries -- their joke, not mine -- discuss each year at the LightCongress symposium.

"Light bulbs are getting more energy-efficient, they're getting smaller, and they're getting a lot more beautiful," said Jon DiGesu of Osram Sylvania. "Some of the biggest news is the compact fluorescent, which saves 75 percent of the energy and lasts 13 times longer. The other big technology move is LED -- light-emitting diodes. Light bulbs are getting tinier and tinier and tinier."

Though people tend to think of lighting as just a common convenience or a pretty accent, the symposium had a lot of discussion about how light can be used to improve mood and even health.



"We have seen the positive effects of light on populations like Alzheimer's disease patients," said Mariana Figueiro of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. "We've seen that applying light for a couple of hours in the evening has helped Alzheimer's patients increase their sleep efficiency."

Another new trend is bendable lighting. Researchers say natural sunlight is the type of light our bodies crave, and one company has figured out a way to pipe it into a building.

"We can duct daylight through multiple stories of a building now," said Neall Digert of Solitube International. "We can have modulation using low-voltage control systems. So now we can actually control daylight, going from 100 percent daylight down to 1 percent or anywhere in between, using a simple wall switch."

Another new trend is bendable lighting.

"CeeLite is LEC technology. That stands for Light Emitting Capacitor, and it's basically the first flexible light bulb," said CeeLite's Gabrielle Santulli. "We can see lighting in flooring. You'll be able to see lighting in ceilings, around columns."

The potential is even there to light clothing one day.

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