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LEDs, Energy Efficiency and Consumption

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LEDs alone won't solve global warming or global poverty, but they are a step in the right direction for both.

To the Editor:

The quest for fire, and hence for light, is a defining characteristic of humankind. Far from being a problem, making light cheaper and more efficient is good news all around.

While the rebound effect has been known for over a century, we also know its limits. In the case of developed countries, there's only so much lighting one can consume — you don't add more lamps in the living room after replacing an inefficient bulb with an LED.

For billions of light-starved citizens in the developing world, lower costs will speed the journey from darkness — and that is a very good thing. What's more, efficiency helps solve a core dilemma of climate protection: how developing countries can grow their economies without following the emissions-intensive path we did.

Energy inefficiency is never good. Focusing on the “backfire” is a mere distraction. LEDs alone won't solve global warming or global poverty, but they are a step in the right direction for both.

Gernot Wagner

Kenneth Gillingham

Cambridge, Mass., Oct. 10, 2014

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Published as *Letter to the Editor* in the New York Times on October 17th, 2014. For a more comprehensive response, see “*Is energy efficiency a good thing even with rebound?*” For a review paper, see “*The Rebound Effect and Energy Efficiency Policy.*”

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