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NF97-335 Making Decisions: Buying Home Appliances

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Making Decisions: Buying Home Appliances

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When you buy an appliance, you are buying a service that may make your life easier. You are also making a decision about saving energy and water, as well as the money they cost. When buying an appliance, consider the energy and water it will need and what they will cost month after month. For example, refrigerators and freezers have been tested to see how much energy they use, but how you use appliances will also affect their energy performance and how much impact they have on your utility bills.

When shopping for an appliance, here are some things you need to consider:

- Your family needs. Larger families may need larger sizes.
- Your lifestyle. If you entertain a lot, you may want larger sizes or more features.
- Available space. Measure the space available for appliances before you shop.
- Environmental concerns — water and energy use.
- Learn to use EnergyGuide labels when available.
- Consider energy efficient and water saving appliances, and those that can be repaired and serviced to keep them operational for a longer period. This saves energy, money, water and natural resources over time. Federal law requires that EnergyGuide labels be placed on all new refrigerators, freezers, water heaters, dishwashers, clothes washers, room and central air conditioners, heat pumps, and furnaces.
- Look for the UL label on all electrical appliances and cords. UL (Underwriters Laboratories, Inc.) tests appliances submitted by manufacturers for safety from electrical shock.
- Do you want to buy new or used? Used appliances may have more risk in repairs and services, but may be cheaper. They may or may not be as efficient as newer machines, but you do save the resources that went into originally manufacturing them.
- Does the appliance have features that make it more convenient and easy to care for?
- What utilities do you have available now? If you change your home service from electric to gas (or from gas to electric), costs can change too.
- Payment method. Using credit adds to the cost of your appliance.

- When buying any appliance you want to have long, service-free use, but problems can occur. How will problems be resolved?
- Shop for appliances with reliable dealers that either provide authorized service or where authorized service is nearby. Before having your appliance serviced, check your warranty to make sure it will cover the service provider you are using.
- Reliable dealers will carry appliances from manufacturers who stand behind their products.
- Check and compare warranties. There may be a full warranty for one year that will cover parts and service. Limited warranties may cover parts only for certain appliance components. Know what kind of protection you are buying.
- Should you buy an extended warranty that covers service after the full warranty ends? Studies have shown that most appliance failures happen in the first year. Compare the warranty with any service contract for similarities or differences in coverage.
- Check and compare consumer comparison studies or information found in your library or Cooperative Extension office. These are often independent profit or not for profit associations.

Now You Own Your Appliance

Once you have chosen an appliance and it is delivered to your home, stay nearby as the appliance is installed. Make sure you have the instruction (use and care) book and warranty. Ask any questions of the installer before he or she leaves. To make sure you get the best service from your appliance, do the following:

- Locate your instruction book. Read through it by the appliance in order to become acquainted with the use and care. Look for the manufacturer's 800 number. Write the model and serial numbers of your appliance in your book. These numbers will probably be on your warranty.
- There should be a registration card with the instruction book. Fill in the card and return it to the manufacturer. This records the date your warranty starts and will be useful if you have a problem with the appliance.
- Read the warranty and note the length of the warranty or warranties offered.
- Keep the appliance clean and coils vacuumed. Position the appliance according to correct recommended temperature.
- It is important to use your appliance and all of the features several times during the warranty period to make sure that everything is operating the way it should.
- Any time you have service, ask for and keep all receipts whether you pay or the appliance's warranty provides for the parts and/or service.
- If you have a problem with your appliance, look in the instruction book before you call for service; there may be something you can do to avoid needing to call. Service costs can frequently be saved by following instructions provided by the manufacturer.
- If your appliance is not working or giving the results it should, begin taking the following steps:
 1. Contact the retailer and/or authorized service agency. (Note: Warranties may be void if you do not use authorized service.) Your complaint may be resolved at this point. Keep records of letters, phone calls and who was contacted.
 2. If your complaint cannot be satisfied by authorized service, call the manufacturer's 800 number. Be prepared to explain what the problem is, a history of the service needed in the past (from your service receipts), and what you feel the company should do to compensate you.
 3. If your complaint cannot be resolved by the manufacturer, contact MACAP (Major Appliance Consumer Action Program) at: MACAP, 20 North Wacker Drive, Chicago, IL 60606; phone: (312) 984-5858.

MACAP is an independent complaint mediation group. After your complaint reaches MACAP, it is immediately forwarded to the appliance company for one last consideration. If you are not satisfied with the company's response, the Panel reviews all important facts about your complaint and considers a specific recommendation to the manufacturer, appropriate to the apparent circumstances. You will need to be ready to supply them with information: model, serial number, dealer, service agency used, the problem, and the service required, repairs needed or what you want done.

Keep all your appliance instruction books, appliance warranties, and any receipts you receive for service in one place. The receipts will be useful if you have problems.

Your appliances can make your life easier and, with proper use and care, will serve you for many years. When you are ready to get rid of an appliance, consider its use by others, recycling, reconditioning or proper disposal. The materials used to make it are valuable resources. See NebFact NF94-189, *Handling Wastes: Household Appliances (White Goods)*. Contact a consumers' magazine or refer to a book for comparison studies about appliances. Check with your library or local Cooperative Extension office.

Other NebFacts in this series include:

- *Making Decisions: Buying a Dishwasher*, NF97-333
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Microwave Oven*, NF97-334
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Refrigerator*, NF97-336
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Range*, NF97-337
- *Making Decisions: Household Water Saving Equipment*, NF97-338
- *Making Decisions: Energy Guides and Major Home Appliances*, NF97-345
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Washing Machine*, NF97-346
- *Making Decisions about Service Contracts and Appliances*, NF97-347
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Clothes Dryer*, NF97-348
- *Handling Wastes: Household Appliances (White Goods)*, NF94-189

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