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NF97-345 Making Decisions: EnergyGuides and Major Home Appliances

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Making Decisions: EnergyGuides and Major Home Appliances

Adapted by Shirley Niemeyer, Extension Specialist, Environment of the Home/Housing

For An Energy-Smart Deal On Your Next Appliance...

- Look for the *EnergyGuide* label.
- Compare the energy use of models.
- Estimate their differences in energy costs.
- Consider both purchase price and estimated energy use when deciding which brand and model to buy. Consider the energy savings over the lifetime of the appliance.

Do all appliances have to be energy efficient?

All major home appliances must meet Federal *minimum* energy efficiency standards set by the Department of Energy. It's the law. But many appliances meet the standard and use even less energy.

Why is energy efficiency important?

The more energy efficient an appliance is, the less it costs to run. Using less energy is good for the environment; it can reduce air pollution and help conserve natural resources. Midwest households consume about 24 percent more energy than U.S. household average energy use.

What makes one appliance more efficient than another?

Most of the differences are on the inside — in the motors, compressors, pumps, valves, gaskets and seals, in electronic sensors that make appliances more "intelligent," and in insulation. Manufacturers must use standard test procedures developed by the Department of Energy to prove the energy use and efficiency of their products. Many have these tests performed by independent laboratories. The test results are reported on the *EnergyGuide*. Retailers are required to display these stickers.

Why do some appliances have EnergyGuides and others don't?

The *EnergyGuide* information is designed to help you compare the annual energy use or efficiency of competing brands and similar models. Look for the distinctive yellow-band-black label on clothes washers, dishwashers, refrigerator/freezers, water heaters, and on home heating and cooling equipment. Some appliances — like clothes dryers, kitchen ranges, and microwave ovens — are exempt from the labeling rule. That's because there is little difference in energy use between the different models. If you don't see a label, ask a salesperson for information.

Shopping Strategy

1. Decide on the size and style. Measure the space the appliance will occupy to be sure your new purchase will fit. It may determine the capacity and style you buy. Make sure, too, that you will have enough room to open the door or lid fully and enough clearance for ventilation.
2. Know where to shop. Appliance outlets, electronic stores, and local retailers may carry different brands and models. Estate sales and stores selling reconditioned appliances are other sources. Factors to consider include the selection available, price, reputation or reliability, warranties, cost of service, distances to service, sources, etc.
3. Decide on key features — and what to spend. Generally, the larger and more deluxe the appliance, the higher the sticker price. Look for the best combination of performance, efficiency, convenience and price that you can afford. What features do you need? What do you use now? What will you use five years from now?
4. Compare the performance of different brands and models. Ask your salesperson for the manufacturer's product literature. Learn what each feature is designed to do and decide which are *essential* for you. Ask questions about how they operate: How much noise does it make? What safety features does it have? How energy efficient is it? How much water does it use? What is the repair history on this brand or model. Check local libraries for books and magazines that may have comparison studies.
5. Estimate how much the energy use will cost. Appliances that use more energy cost more to operate. Since these products are designed to last 10-20 years, the differences on your monthly energy bill can add up. Check your utility bill for energy costs in your area. Use the *EnergyGuide* to compare the energy use of different models.
6. Ask about special energy efficiency offers. Ask your local utility or salesperson whether there are cash rebates, low interest loans, or other incentive programs in your area for buying energy efficient products — and how you can qualify. Additional savings could be just a few, easy steps away. Contact your state Energy Office about any energy information or programs they may have.
7. Resist high-pressure sales tactics. Don't make a purchase decision until you think you understand your choices and the trade-offs you're making.
8. Find out about services for delivery and cost of pick up of old appliances. Is it free or is there a fee? Some won't pick up old appliances and you may have to pay to have them taken away to be recycled, disposed of or resold. If it is still usable, sell it, or give it to someone who needs an appliance. You're saving resources and energy for each appliance conditioned for reuse.
9. What are the top ten energy-users? Generally, appliances using more energy include water heaters, refrigerators, freezers, air conditioners, ranges, clothes washers, clothes dryers,

dishwashers, portable space heaters and lights. Space heating is typically the largest energy user (depending on climate).

Tips for Lowering Your Monthly Energy Bill

Being an energy-smart consumer means getting the most from the energy you use. Here are some ways to cut energy waste and save natural resources.

- Move the *refrigerator* if it is currently located near the stove, dishwasher, heat vents or in an unheated or overheated area. Vacuum the coils every three months; dirt build-up makes the machine work harder to keep contents cool. Check the door gaskets for air leaks. If ice buildup in the freezer is more than 1/4 inch thick, defrost. Avoid placing rugs or other objects in front of the ventilation system or blocking air flow.
- Scrape but don't prerinse your dishes by hand if you have a *dishwasher* that automatically prerinses or has a rinse/hold cycle or the handbook indicates it is not necessary. Machines with these features are designed to dispose of all food particles. Using the "energy saver" option found on many machines can reduce the energy needed to wash a load of dishes, and saves time and water.
- Preheat your *oven* only when the recipe calls for it and turn off the oven shortly before the recipe suggests. The heat in the oven can finish the job.
- Cook in pots that fit the size of your *stove top* burners to cut energy waste. Using lids on your pots and pans means you can lower the temperatures and reduce the energy used.
- Match the water level and temperature settings on your *clothes washer* to the size of your load. Don't fill the tub full for just a few small items. Follow the manufacturer's directions for other energy saving hints.
- Remember to clean *clothes dryer* filters after each use, or as recommended by manufacturer.
- Lower the temperature setting on your *water heater*. Many thermostats are preset at the factory at 140 degrees. Lowering it to 120 degrees will save you 15 percent of your water heating energy. However, some dishwashers and clothes washers may heat up to 140° F to disinfect or clean. Check the manufacturer's recommendations for adequate cleaning and temperature recommendations for washing laundry and dishes.

For More Information

These sources of consumer information can help you make informed decisions about energy efficient products or systems. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is an independent agency that seeks to protect and public against unfair, deceptive, and fraudulent advertising and marketing practices.

For a complete list of free FTC publications, contact:

Best Sellers
Public Reference
Federal Trade Commission
Washington, DC 20580

(202) 326-222; TDD: (202) 326-2502
(Also see *Energy Guide to Home Heating and Cooling*).

FTC Headquarters:

6th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20580
(202) 326-2222
TDD (202) 326-2502

FTC Regional Offices:

55 East Monroe Street, Suite 1860
Chicago, Illinois 60603
(312) 353-4423

1961 Stout Street Suite 1523
Denver, Colorado 80294
(303) 844-2271

Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy Clearinghouse

U.S. Department of Energy — EREC
P. O. Box 3048
Merrifield, VA 22116
Toll free 1-800-DOE-EREC
TDD 1-800-273-2957

Your state and local energy offices

Nebraska Energy Office
Atrium Bldg, Suite 110
1200 "N" Street, Box 95085
Lincoln, NE 68509-5085
(402) 471-2867

Your local utility company

Your 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 Home Appliances*, NF97-335
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Refrigerator*, NF97-336
- *Making Decisions: Buying a Range*, NF97-337
- *Making Decisions: Household Water Saving Equipment*, NF97-338
- *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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