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EFFICIENCY

ENERGY STAR "MOST EFFICIENT" BECOMES GOLD STANDARD FOR APPLIANCES

BY JEANNE ROBERTS ON JULY 21, 2011



The [Energy Star program](#), a joint undertaking between the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, or EPA, is designed to identify those appliances, building products, electronics, heating and cooling devices, lighting and fans, and water heaters which use the least amount of energy (and/or water or other nonrenewable resources), and use it most efficiently.

Aimed at helping Americans buy "green" and also saving the environment through fewer greenhouse gas emissions, the program now has a new gold standard.

It's called 'Most Efficient', and represents additional, critical [energy efficiency standards](#) manufacturers must follow to earn the label.

Interestingly enough, the label will never appear on the appliances themselves, or on product packaging. Nor can it be used to suggest or imply Energy Star partnership or endorsement. In fact, the designation [logo](#) can't be resized, except as an integral unit, or reproduced in any color but Energy Star Blue – the equivalent of 100 percent cyan. It also can't be used on business cards, letterhead, non-product specific promotional materials, stationary, or company vehicles, which makes it sound more like corporate branding than an energy efficiency program.

Instead, it attaches to various promotional materials like sales tickets, brochures, flyers, and can even be used on the various websites. Manufacturers are reportedly in almost complete accord with these restrictions, albeit for reasons of their own (paragraph 29, [World Energy Council report](#), Energy Efficiency Policies around the World).

The labeling restriction is a puzzling one in a world aimed at greening itself before global climate meltdown, and no one has so far offered an explanation, other than the fact that 2011 is a [pilot year](#) for the Most Efficient program, meaning that the EPA may have to update specifications annually – thus obsolescing any labels pasted on appliances which fail to meet a future year's set of mandates.

The deadline for submission for inclusion under the Most Efficient label is November 30, and applicants must be Energy Star partners "in good standing". They must also have submitted the product to an EPA-recognized [certification agency](#).

So far, the [winners](#) include Crosley, Electrolux AB ([ELUXY.PK](#)), Frigidaire, Insignia (a Best Buy brand), Kenmore (a Sears Roebuck & Co. brand), LG, Nordyne, Panasonic Corp. ([NYSE.PC](#)), Rheem, and Samsung SDI Co., Ltd. ([KSE.006400.KS](#)). LG and Samsung are the clear winners in the electronics category, while Rheem takes first place, second place *and* best of show in the heating/cooling category.

The standards are challenging, but not insurmountable. For example, [refrigerators](#) have to be about [30 percent more efficient](#) than they are now – which isn't asking much of most brands. Televisions, on the other hand, need to achieve 80-percent more efficiency, and it's interesting to note that both winners, Samsung and LG, are Korean firms.

The EPA is hoping that manufacturers will be inspired to shoot for the Most Efficient labeling by the fact that Americans reportedly [saved \\$18 billion](#) on energy bills in 2010 by buying Energy Star-rated products.

Americans themselves, facing another year of record joblessness, may not be so enthusiastic. According to a 2003 [report](#) from the conservative think tank, the Cato Institute, energy efficiency standards will in fact cost consumers an additional \$46.4 billion to \$56.2 billion through 2050, in addition to the \$250 million needed to run programs for the period.

However, this report is already eight years old, so I did a little price comparison of my own. I chose washing machines, which is about the only thing I need, and – though I would normally buy a top loader because it's cheaper – I compared Samsung's WF511 front-loading washer with a best-selling top-loading machine and was surprised.

The top-loading LG WT5001 sells for \$549. Of course, it uses about three times as much water, doesn't spin clothing as dry (so uses 25 percent more gas or electricity to dry clothes), and chews fabric up compared to gentle front loaders. If you add those costs back in, the cost is [closer to \\$768](#).

The front-loading Samsung WF511 sells for \$845. You use less detergent, and it's specially designed to be low-sudsing, so the



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Jeanne Roberts is a freelance writer on environment and sustainability issues. In her previous life, she worked as both a reporter and a communications specialist for a major public utility. Her most recent book, Green Your Home, approaches environmentalism from a consumer's perspective.

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