

What to look for in energy labels

By Doris Cross
special writer

If you're shopping for a new appliance, include energy efficiency on your list of important features to consider. To help you compare the energy efficiency and estimated operating costs of different models of major appliances, a new federal rule requiring yellow and black "Energyguide" labels has been in effect for one year.

The rule requires labels on refrigerators, freezers, dishwashers, clothes washers, water heaters, room air conditioners, central air conditioners and furnaces.

Three types of labels are used. One type displays general information and directs consumers to ask to see a fact sheet about the appliance. The fact sheets include the manufacturer's estimate of energy efficiency and estimated yearly cost information. This type of label is on central air conditioners and furnaces.

A SECOND type of label is used on room air conditioners. It lists energy efficiency ratings (EER). An energy efficiency rating is a number that can be compared with other ratings to determine the relative energy efficiency of similar appliances. The higher the

EER number, the more efficient the appliance.

For example, EERs for room air conditioners could be as low as 5 and as high as 10.2. An air conditioner with an EER of 10 would be twice as efficient as one with an EER of 5. In other words, it would use less than half as much electricity.

If you are buying a refrigerator, refrigerator-freezer or water heater, there is a third type of label called a cost label. This label shows the estimated annual energy cost of that model.

For example, if you're going to buy a refrigerator, you will be able to com-

pare two refrigerators of the same capacity to see which costs less to operate and which is more energy efficient.

A variation of the cost label is affixed to dishwashers and clothes washers. Because the main expense of using a dishwasher or clothes washer is the cost of heating the water, this label shows two sets of costs — one for electric water heaters and one for gas water heaters.

ONLY GAS and electric costs are shown because 90 percent of all water heaters in this country are fueled by electricity or gas.

Old-style wiring can start fires

More than one and a half million American houses built between 1965 and 1973 may have inadequately installed connections that could cause overheating and create the potential for a fire.

This old technology aluminum expands and contracts, as power is turned on and off, at a higher rate than copper.

It is believed that this expanding and contracting can cause old technology aluminum wire to come loose from in-

adequately attached terminations and oxidize. Oxidation leads to increased resistance, which can cause overheating and fires.

Inadequate connections of the wire can create the potential for a fire. This potential might exist in wall outlets, lighting fixtures, switches and connections to appliances.

And as the wiring system ages, the potential for overheating becomes greater.

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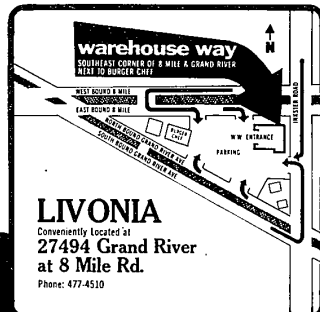
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