



# DOES IT PAY TO BUY... energy-efficient appliances?

by BROOKE SHOWELL

**T**here's no doubt that energy-efficient appliances are good for the planet—they use less power and lower greenhouse gas emissions. But does paying up to 20% more make fiscal sense? That depends on the machine you replace, your lifestyle and how you shop. Here's how to ensure you're making a cost-effective move.

## ✓ Do your research

There are more than 60 categories of energy-efficient products, and there can be a big difference between two very similar-looking models. Look for the Energy Star label (the government-backed symbol for energy efficiency) and the yellow EnergyGuide tag, which lists the appliance's projected annual running cost. Before hitting the stores, visit [energystar.gov](http://energystar.gov), which allows you to input information about how often you use your appliances and find model recommendations.

## ✓ Replace your oldest, largest machines first

Do so and you can cut utility costs by more than a third per year. Swap out appliances you've had for more than 15 years—these may break soon anyway, and they're so much less efficient than today's models that the utility savings you'll see will offset the cost of new ones. If you can afford to upgrade further, go for large appliances you use often, like your fridge. These eat up more energy to begin with, and the more they run, the bigger the impact on your wallet.

### Who knew?

- ▶ **Refrigerators** built in the early 1990s use twice the amount of energy that today's models do. A bottom door freezer is the most efficient type.
- ▶ The average U.S. family runs its **dishwasher** 110 times a year. Pre-1994 models tend to add about \$40 per year to your utility bill.
- ▶ On average, a new energy-efficient **washing machine** costs only \$85 to run each year and uses 20% less energy than a regular model.



✓ **Take advantage of rebates** You can whittle down the price of appliances by shopping at retailers that offer incentives to buy energy-efficient products. (Visit [energystar.gov/DIME](http://energystar.gov/DIME) to browse a database of consumer programs available across the U.S.) Rebates could range from \$25 to \$75 for an air conditioner or fridge, to \$30 to \$150 for a washing machine. Also, many states offer occasional holidays when you can buy tax-free (a quick Internet search will give options in your area).

**OM LINE** *Replace any appliance that's 15 years or older with the most efficient model you can afford. If you have a newer model, wait until it breaks, then go energy-efficient.*

SOURCES: Pascale Maslin, founder, Energy Efficiency Experts, LLC, Washington, DC. Monique O'Grady, vice president of communications, Alliance To Save Energy, Washington, DC.