

Efficiency Standards Protect Consumer Choice

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Existing law requires the U.S. Department of Energy to adopt efficiency standards that reduce households' and businesses' utility bills—while ensuring that consumers continue to enjoy an abundance of models and product features from which to choose.

Efficiency standards for residential, commercial, and industrial equipment ensure that new products for sale meet a minimum level of energy or water efficiency. First set in 1987, national standards now cover more than 50 categories of products and have a proven record of saving households and businesses money by reducing their utility bills.

Consumers today have far greater choice in the products on the market than in the years before standards were introduced, even as energy and water use have declined significantly. For example, manufacturers now offer more than 11,000 distinct refrigerator models, 1,600 washing machine models and 1,400 dishwasher models, according to a Department of Energy database.

Existing law ensures consumers have access to valued product features and types

The law requires that when the Department of Energy strengthens standards, it ensures that consumers continue to have access to product features they value. For example, different configurations of refrigerators—such as those with the freezer on the top or the bottom, and those with French doors—have separate standards, driving improvements in each while retaining all as options. The standards allow models with through-the-door ice to use more energy than models without that feature. And recently updated standards account for newer features such as see-through doors.

The department is expressly prohibited by law from setting standards that would eliminate categories of products that use a particular fuel type, such as gas. Updated standards for water heaters and those for stoves, both finalized in 2024, required much greater efficiency improvements for electric models than for gas ones, all while ensuring each product type can continue to serve customers.

Standards make products better

In addition to lowering utility bills, high-efficiency appliances often perform better than their less efficient counterparts. For example, more efficient window air conditioners are generally quieter and provide more consistent temperatures than less efficient models. And among top-loading washing machines, more efficient models generally wash clothes more effectively, Consumer Reports testing has shown. As standards have pushed products to be more efficient, Americans have benefited from stronger product performance.

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