

Stronger Washing Machine Standards Needed to Cut Utility Bills and Climate Pollution

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Federal efficiency standards for residential clothes washers have not been updated in more than a decade, even though much more efficient washing machines are now available on the market. Upcoming Department of Energy (DOE) standards could ensure all models waste less energy and water, saving money for their users and protecting the planet.

DOE is expected to propose updated energy and water efficiency standards for home clothes washers early this year. Strong standards are needed to prevent consumers from getting saddled with outdated technology that causes higher utility bills and environmentally destructive water waste and planet-warming emissions.



Clothes washers on the market today vary widely in their efficiency—particularly among top-loading models. For example, the most efficient top-loaders use only about half as much water as models just meeting the current standards. While some new top-loaders use efficient impellers (or “wash plates”), others still use old-fashioned agitators that require more energy and water—and generally don’t clean clothes as well, [Consumer Reports has found](#). These models also don’t spin out rinse water as thoroughly, requiring a clothes dryer to run longer and use more energy. Today’s DOE standards have separate efficiency requirements for top-loaders and front-loaders; the latter are generally more efficient.

Stronger standards could ensure that all models take advantage of known improvements, such as using an impeller in place of an agitator, increasing spin speeds, reducing the amount of water consumed (hot water is a significant portion of washer energy usage), and using a more efficient motor.

Under federal law, DOE was required to propose new standards for clothes washers by 2018, but it missed that deadline. It is imperative that the agency now propose strong standards.

SAVE CONSUMERS MONEY

Inefficient washers cost more over the lifetime of the product because they require more energy and water to operate. High-efficiency machines more than pay back their higher upfront cost, DOE found in a [2021 analysis](#).

Stronger standards are particularly important to reduce utility costs for renters, who rarely get to choose their own clothes washers. Renters are disproportionately low-income households, and [DOE data](#) show that most renters have a clothes washer in their home, one that is much more likely to be a top-loading model. Strong efficiency standards can help ensure that landlords buy efficient washers—whether they're top-loaders or front-loaders—for their rental units.

CUT GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND WATER WASTE

Strong efficiency standards for clothes washers would cut greenhouse gas emissions. For both top-loading and front-loading machines, improving the efficiency of the washers would reduce the significant energy—electricity or gas—used by water heaters and clothes dryers (since better-spun clothes dry faster).

With much of the western United States in a water crisis, eliminating needless water use is also critical. Clothes washers account for 16% of households' [indoor water use](#), which could be reduced with stronger standards.

Because clothes washers can generally last a decade or two, standards are needed to help prevent households from buying already-outdated appliances that guarantee needless emissions and water waste for years to come.

IMPROVE CLOTHES WASHING RESULTS

Front-loading models clean clothes most effectively in Consumer Reports' tests, while among top-loaders, more efficient models generally perform better than the less efficient ones. In the organization's current ratings based on its testing, top-loader models using agitators have an average "washing performance" score of 3.4 (out of 5), while high-efficiency top-loader models score an average of 4.0.