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# ***FTC Consumer Alert***

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

## **Buying a Washing Machine? It's a Load-ed Question**

If you're in the market for a new washing machine, consider sinking your clothes into an energy-efficient one. It will not only conserve energy but, closer to home, can help lower your utility bills.

To help consumers see just how energy-efficient a washing machine is, the Federal Trade Commission requires manufacturers to post an EnergyGuide label on their appliances. The Guide shows how each model measures up – energy-wise – to others of the same size.

For many years, the Guides compared top-loading models with similarly sized top-loaders, and front-loading washers with similarly sized front-loaders. But changes in technology and marketing are resulting in changes in the law: Starting July 2000, changes to the FTC's Appliance Labeling Rule and the familiar yellow-and-black EnergyGuide will make both more meaningful for consumers and manufacturers.

With front-loaders now more widely available for purchase in the U.S., the FTC has decided to require manufacturers to provide information that will compare all washing machines of a certain size (either "standard" or "compact") with others of the same size, regardless of whether they are loaded from the top or the front. The label change is expected to alert consumers to highly energy-efficient clothes washers and spur competition among U.S. manufacturers. Front-loaders, which have been popular for years in Europe, generally are considered more energy efficient than top-loaders, although they usually are more expensive, too.

### **Spinning to a Different Drum**

Most washing machines sold in the U.S. are top-loaders. They wash the clothes with an agitator that turns on a vertical axis. The tub also spins the clothes dry on a vertical axis. Front-loaders work by tumbling the clothes and then spin-drying them in a tub that rotates on a horizontal axis.

There are some exceptions: One manufacturer makes a horizontal-axis machine that loads from the top, and another company sells a machine with an axis that is between vertical and horizontal.

Typically, front-loaders use less water – from one-third to one-half the amount that top-loaders require. The clothes tumble in the tub, rising above the water and then falling back into it as the tub rolls on its side. Because less water is used, less gas or electricity is required to heat the water; because the machines spin faster, clothes get wrung out more completely, reducing the cost of running a clothes dryer.

Horizontal-axis washers (front-loaders) have one major drawback: They can cost more than vertical-axis machines. Still, with the energy savings they provide, front-loaders may save you money in the long run. In some areas of the U.S., utility companies, environmental groups and government agencies help sweeten the deal by offering incentives to consumers who buy front-loaders. At the same time, there are many highly efficient top-loaders available, too. Use the EnergyGuide to find efficient products at the price that's right for you.

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## Reading the EnergyGuide

The bright yellow-and-black EnergyGuide label helps consumers factor an appliance's energy consumption or efficiency and its annual operating cost into their purchasing decision. The law requires manufacturers to place the label on most major appliances so that consumers will see it when they are considering various models.

The EnergyGuide for clothes washers uses kilowatt-hours (a measure of electricity use) to tell how much energy each appliance uses in a year and compares the appliance with other appliances of the same or similar size. The range on the label – where the appliance's energy use is on a continuum – is of particular benefit to consumers: A marker shows where the particular model falls in the range and how it stacks up against the competition.

The EnergyGuide also gives the estimated cost per year to run the particular model when it is used with an electric water heater and with a natural gas water heater.

## Saving Energy

Getting the best energy value from any washing machine depends on several energy-saving wash-day practices. For example:

- If possible, wash one big load rather than two small ones.
- Load the washer to capacity.
- If you must wash smaller loads, select lower water levels, if possible.
- Use cold water rinses.
- Use lower temperature settings and pre-treat or pre-soak stains or heavily soiled clothing.
- Use the recommended amount and type of detergent.
- Set the thermostat on your water heater to no higher than 120 degrees Fahrenheit.

## For More Information

For more information on a variety of consumer protection issues, contact the FTC's Consumer Response Center by phone, toll-free, at 1-877-FTC-HELP (382-4357) (TDD: 202-326-2502); online at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov); or by mail, at Consumer Response Center, FTC, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, D.C. 20580.