

Submission to Ann Arbor News “Your World” column for 1-23-05:

According to MichCon, Washtenaw County residents are paying up to 60% more for natural gas this year. With electricity costs projected to increase as well, we are all looking for ways to reduce our utility bills. Many of us have already taken simple steps, such as sealing air leaks, turning down the heat at night, and switching to compact fluorescent lightbulbs. But there is always more you can do—for ideas, check out the U.S. Department of Energy’s “Energy Savers Booklet” at www.eere.energy.gov/consumer/.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that almost 35% of the average household’s energy bill pays to keep appliances and electronics running. Investing in new energy-efficient appliances will not only reduce your utility bill, it also reduces the amount of mercury and CO₂ that power plants release into the air. For instance, a new efficient refrigerator will emit an average 450 pounds less CO₂ per year than a 10-year-old fridge, the EPA says.

Appliances, lighting, and office equipment that exceed federal energy efficiency minimums receive the EPA’s “Energy Star” certification. Incentives to purchase them include a \$300 tax credit (available in 2006-07) for buying Energy Star air conditioners, water heaters, and furnaces.

Here are some guidelines on shopping for energy efficient appliances:

- Check out the Energy Star website – www.energystar.gov. It lists all the products which comply, and compares them to other models in both energy usage and cost.
- Look for the Energy Star logo while shopping, but note that not all products that qualify have the logo on the product, the box, or even on the tag. The best bet is to consult the website above, to be sure.
- Be aware that many new appliances must carry the distinctive yellow and black "EnergyGuide" label, but this does not mean the product has received Energy Star status. Rather, the EnergyGuide label is a tool which allows you to compare the energy usage and cost of the model you are looking at with models similar in type and size.
- Get the right size. Be sure that the product you are buying suits your needs—appliances that are too large waste energy and in many cases do not perform as well.
- Think long-term. Although energy efficient appliances can cost more initially, they will save money in the long run.

If you do decide to invest in energy efficient appliances this year and need to dispose of old ones, take them to the Washtenaw County Regional Drop-off Station—for a small fee the materials are recycled and the hazardous wastes (such as Freon in refrigerators) are captured. Call them at 734-971-7400 or visit www.recycleannarbor.org.

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