

Energy Department tightens standards for home water heaters

New efficiency standards released early this month by the Department of Energy will deliver substantial energy savings nationwide by making each of the millions of new water heaters installed more energy efficient, according to a coalition of energy efficiency, consumer, and environmental organizations.

For the very largest home water heaters, the new efficiency standards will, for the first time, require advanced technologies (heat pumps for electrically-powered products and condensing technology for gas products), paving the way for even bigger future savings, the coalition said.

"From washing hands to hot showers to clean dishes, we all rely on water heaters for our daily needs," said Steven Nadel, executive director of the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. "These new standards will deliver big national energy savings, reduce consumer energy bills, and cut pollution."

For most product sizes sold, the new standards can be met with modest changes, such as adding more insulation to today's conventional tank-style water heaters, DOE said. For the most common size electric water heater (50 gallons), the standards will save 4%, while for the most common size gas water heater (40 gallons), the new standards will save 3%, said the coalition.

"These per unit savings add up to big national impacts, since more than nine million home water heaters are sold every year and water heating accounts for some 12% of the typical home's energy use," said the groups.

However, for the biggest products (those with over 55 gallons in storage capacity, which is about 9% and 4% of the electric and gas water heater markets, respectively), the new standards can be met only with heat pump and condensing technology, the coalition said. Heat pump electric water heaters save at least 50% and gas condensing water heaters save about 25%, relative to today's conventional storage water heaters, the group said.

"In the long run, a shift to electric heat pump and condensing gas water heaters is absolutely essential if we are to make deep cuts in household energy use and costs," said Jeffrey Harris, vice president of national programs at the Alliance to Save Energy. "DOE deserves tremendous credit for kick-starting this transition with its new standards

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