



PTRC Building

220 - 6 Research Dr.

Regina, SK

Canada S4S 7J7

Hotline: 1-800-668-4636

In Saskatoon: 933-6865

e-mail: oecinfo@src.sk.ca

The Refrigerator: A Household Energy Glutton *by Saskatchewan's Office of Energy Conservation*

Next to your furnace and water heater, the refrigerator is probably the largest energy consumer in your home.

Refrigerators and other large appliances are responsible for about 37% of the electricity used in the average Saskatchewan household. Although the oven or clothes dryer draws more energy when they are being used, a refrigerator or freezer uses more energy overall because it is in use all the time.

Fortunately, manufacturers are continuously improving the energy performance of appliances. Today's refrigerators and freezers, for example, use at least 60% less energy on average than those built 20 years ago. Today's more energy-efficient refrigerators cost about \$50 a year to operate - on average; this is less than half the operating cost of a 15 to 20-year old model.

If you have an older fridge, it may make sense to purchase a new model. Over 10-15 years, energy savings will pay for a moderately-priced refrigerator.

If you are considering a new fridge, look for models with the EnergyStar® label. EnergyStar® is an international program that rates products for energy efficiency. EnergyStar®-qualified refrigerators will save you the most money in operating costs because they use between 15 and 20% less electricity than refrigerators that are the same size and have the same features. In Saskatchewan, Energy Star® refrigerators are also PST exempt! Note that it is important to read the energy rating on the EnerGuide label that comes with all new refrigerators to ensure that you are getting the best-performing refrigerator.

It is also important to select the right size of fridge for your needs. A model that is too big wastes money and energy, while one that is too small, and is overcrowded with food and drinks, will also waste money as cool air circulation inside the fridge will be reduced, making it impossible for your refrigerator to cool the contents efficiently. In some cases it may make sense to get a very slightly larger refrigerator if it will consume less energy than the EnergyStar® refrigerator in the size that you are considering.

When you buy a new refrigerator, think twice about keeping the old model in the basement or garage as a second fridge. This defeats the purpose of a buying the new, efficient model. The landfills in Regina and Saskatoon will dispose of your old fridge safely, including removal of the freon gas.

If you do have a second fridge, unplugging it could save you about \$100 a year. You can always plug it in for special occasions when you need extra capacity.



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Whether you have an energy-efficient fridge or not, there are a number of measures you can take to further reduce its energy use. Most of these measures cost nothing.

- Leave enough space around the refrigerator for air movement and position the fridge away from heat sources which make it work harder to stay cool. Heat sources include direct sunlight, furnace vents, and radiators, as well as heat-producing appliances such as the oven or dishwasher. Also, keep your refrigerator temperature setting between 1.7°C (35°F) and 3.3°C (38°F) and the freezer compartment at -18°C (0°F) for maximum efficiency.
- Proper maintenance and use is important. Clean the refrigerator heating coils regularly (if they are visible on your refrigerator). The rubber door seal of the fridge and freezer compartment should be clean and tight enough to hold a piece of paper snugly. If the paper slips out easily, replace the seal. Switch the butter conditioner to "hard" to save energy, and if the refrigerator is not self-defrosting, defrost it regularly to maintain efficient operation.
- Keeping the refrigerator well organized. By packaging your leftovers and purchased items so that they can be put into the fridge efficiently, you will lower energy use by reducing the amount of time the door remains open.
- If you have a separate freezer unit, it makes sense to reassess its use too. If you no longer use your freezer extensively, it may be time to unplug it or to purchase a smaller, more energy-efficient model. Chest freezers are generally more efficient than upright models because lifting the lid on a chest freezer releases less cold air.

Many of the use and maintenance tips that apply to refrigerators—such as placing the appliance away from heat sources—also apply to your freezer.

The Office of Energy Conservation is a resource for information on cost-effective energy conservation initiatives and practices for Saskatchewan. For more ideas on saving money through energy efficiency, visit the OEC website at www.oec.ca or call the OEC Hotline at 1-800-668-4636.