

Rebate Program for Clothes Washers Changing in 2007

by Dale Lessick

Currently, both energy and many water utilities fund rebates on nearly 100 models of commercial clothes washers. The list of rebate-eligible washers is expected to change in January 2007 to a more strict efficiency standard. As a result, many models will drop off the eligibility list, including all top-loaders.

The list of rebate-eligible washers is maintained by the Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE), a national non-profit organization that promotes the manufacture of energy efficient products. CEE has been working towards aligning its commercial standards with the much stricter Energy Star® residential washer standards.

According to CEE's Erica Shroeder, "We anticipate that the CEE board of directors will adopt the proposed changes and that the new standards will go into effect on January 1, 2007."

Energy rebates of \$130 per washer are now available in areas served by the four largest energy utilities, including So Cal Gas ("The Gas Company") and Southern California Edison. Many water utilities also offer rebates ranging from \$100 to over \$600 per washer. Energy rebates will no longer be offered for the models that drop off CEE's list; this is also expected to affect all of the top-loaders currently eligible. The good news is that the energy rebates and most of the water rebates will continue for the remaining, most efficient models.

Utility costs for laundry room operations are a large and growing expense. For instance, a top loading machine over ten years old operating at four turns per day likely costs you about \$380 per washer per year in gas, electricity, water and sewer expenses (depending on utility rates). **More efficient top loaders could cut these expenses by up to 50%.** Efficient front-loaders save even more.

Broadly speaking, you have two choices. The top-loaders are the least expensive models currently eligible for rebates, but they also save the least amount of water and energy. Over the life of the machine, you will, in most cases, be ahead with one of the more efficient machines, but they do cost a bit more up-front. The most efficient, front-load machines also typically allow for an increase in the vend rate which can significantly increase your net return from laundry operations, making them, by far, the most economically attractive option.

While you still have the most options available, call your commercial clothes washer distributor or route operator before 2007. They can help you determine what option will work best for you, given your laundry room conditions.

If you decide your preferred choice is a model currently listed on Tier 1 or Tier 2 of the CEE list, you are most in danger of losing the rebates when the new standards take effect.

The CEE list is posted at www.cee1.org in the "Commercial Clothes Washer" page under "Qualifying Products." The effective date is noted at the top of the page.

To ensure eligibility for both water and energy rebates, you must make your purchase or sign your lease prior to the date the new list goes into effect (expected to be January 1, 2007). Both the energy rebate and the Save-A-Buck water rebate programs will allow extra time to have the machines installed.

The energy program in the SoCalGas/SCE territory also offers hot water pipe wrap and lighting upgrades to SCE customers at no charge. **SCE customers who have an electric water heater (no gas service), are also eligible for the \$130 rebate.**

For information on the energy Commercial Laundry Program go to www.conservationsrebates.com and click on the “Commercial Laundry” icon. The energy rebate is payable to the owner of the equipment and new washers must be replacing old washers. In areas served by the Save-A-Buck water rebates, both water and energy rebates may be processed through that system. Information for that program is posted at www.mwdsaveabuck.com.

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