

## LIVING GREEN

## Reining in the energy guzzlers



NICK KOZAK FOR THE TORONTO STAR

Simple advances in techonology, such as timers, help major appliances become more efficient

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Of all the technologies designed to reduce your energy bills, an old classic is probably the most helpful: a simple timer.

Increasingly built into major appliances, timers can help energy-guzzling machines do their work in off-peak hours, which saves you money and reduces the demand for increased electricity production in the province.

"Timers can really deliver savings," says Greg Labbé, director of green consulting at Greensaver, Ontario's oldest not-for-profit organization providing energy audits and services.

Other technological advances in home appliances can help reduce your carbon footprint. The good news, says Tom White, publisher of California-based *Home Energy* magazine, is there are more effi-

cient products available at different price points. Energy savings used to be the domain of higher-end products.

"Generally, more-efficient appliances work better, there's less maintenance and they shouldn't be more expensive," he says.

Refrigerators are the "low hanging fruit" of energy efficiency, according to Labbé. Certainly, fridges bought since 1993, when energy-efficiency standards dramatically changed, will save you a substantial amount of money over a model that came in Harvest Gold or Avocado Green. That said, White suggests waiting until 2014 to upgrade a fridge bought since then.

"Standards haven't changed much in the last decade," he explains. "If you've bought something in the last few years, it's probably better to repair it than to dispose of it."

In 2014, the U.S. Department of

Energy will require refrigerators to be 25-per-cent more efficient than they are now, the first such revision since 2001.

Clothes washers have seen dramatic improvements in water efficiency over the past decade. Some front-loading machines use as little as six litres of water, compared to 56 litres a decade ago. That also saves on energy needed to heat the water.

"You can't beat horizontal axis (front-loading) washers for water savings," says Labbé. "The other nice thing about them is that the speeds are higher. Mechanically spinning out the water is more energy-efficient than raising the temperature, so it saves on drying."

More dishwashers (as well as furnaces) are being sold with ECM motors. Using a direct drive — there's no transmission — they are more energy-efficient and can also save water. They're increasingly popular in Australia.

"Because they've had water shortages, a lot of water innovations are coming from Australia now," says

Labbé. As well as a timer, dishwashers should include controls for air drying the dishes without heat.

Savings are slimmer on newer stoves, especially electric ranges. There's so little to differentiate them that Energy Star, the leading international rating system, doesn't even rank them.

Tankless water heaters have been in the spotlight the past few years, with proponents claiming they reduce energy consumption by more than 25 per cent over a traditional hot water heater.

"It doesn't make much sense keeping a 40-gallon (150-litre) tank of water hot all the time," says White. "But it depends on the household."

Although technology has dramatically improved the energy efficiency of major appliances, White points out it has also added to the overall household energy loads. About 10 to 15 per cent of a home's energy load is now devoted to small devices: chargers, computers, cordless phones, digital video recorders, cable converters, toasters and anything that has a standby light on it.

White suggests plugging them into a switched power bar, and turning it off when they're not in use.

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