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**Savings, Style and Performance Fuel Growing Demand for
ENERGY STAR® Qualified Clothes Washers**

- Wisconsin market share more than double national rate -

MADISON, Wis. (April 13, 2004) – A combination of eye-catching style, superior performance and substantial energy, water and bottom-line savings are making ENERGY STAR® qualified clothes washers an increasingly common feature in Wisconsin laundry rooms. In fact, the energy efficient machines can be found in 38 percent of Wisconsin laundry rooms – more than double the national average of 14 percent.

Clothes washers that have earned the ENERGY STAR use at least 50 percent less energy than their conventional counterparts and only 18 to 25 gallons of water per load, compared to nearly 40 gallons per load with a conventional machine, lowering users’ utility bills and helping protect the environment. They also deliver superior performance by reducing drying time and helping keep clothes looking newer longer.

“When the folks from the ENERGY STAR program first approached us and told us that there are \$1,000 machines that we wouldn’t be able to keep in stock, I wanted to laugh,” said Cleat Killgallon, owner of Brothers Main, an appliance retailer with two locations in Madison, Wis. and a store scheduled to open in Janesville, Wis. later this month. “At that time, selling a \$499 machine was a stretch. Now, six years later, ENERGY STAR qualified machines make up the majority of our washer sales.”

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The reason for increases in purchases of qualified machines, according to Killgallon and other state retailers, has been educating consumers about the benefits of the machines and demonstrating their long-term value.

“Because costs continue to rise, people today are much more aware of their energy and water use and they are looking for ways to conserve,” said Paul Boatman, appliance buyer for FS Appliance & TV, a retailer with locations in Eau Claire, Rice Lake and Ladysmith. “It’s easy to demonstrate that while you’ll spend a bit more on an ENERGY STAR qualified machine, you’ll recoup your investment in energy and water savings in just a few years. Combine the savings with the superior performance of qualified models, and it’s very attractive to consumers.”

On average, more than 60 percent of the washers sold at FS Appliance & TV are ENERGY STAR qualified – a dramatic leap from the 20 percent to 30 percent rate of just one year ago. Some months see sales of the ENERGY STAR qualified machines jump as high as 75 percent.

Colder’s, a retailer with three Milwaukee-area locations, is witnessing the same increases in sales of qualified clothes washers. Approximately 40 percent of the washers Colder’s sells are qualified – up from only 20 percent a year ago. “Sales of ENERGY STAR qualified washers have been increasing by double digits every month,” said Al Ruiz, appliance and electronics buyer for the retail chain. “It’s really a no-brainer for us to sell – and the customer will always want to buy – a better product. When they see how nice looking these machines are and when they learn about the savings they will experience both in energy and water, there really is no reason for them to look at anything other than a qualified clothes washer.”

Soaking Up Savings

Reducing energy and water consumption – and the associated utility bills – are the primary purchase motivators, the retailers said.

“Energy efficiency has been a hot topic in our area for a long time,” Brothers Main’s Killgallon said. “Water service is quite expensive in some of the suburbs, so using a washer that cuts water use in half can make a big difference in that quarterly water bill. I’ve had customers report 25 percent to 50 percent drops in their water bills.”

Colders’ Ruiz shared the story of a customer who was visited by a representative of her water utility and asked why her water consumption had decreased by 40 percent over the previous six months. Her response – her son had gone away to college and she had purchased an ENERGY STAR qualified clothes washer.

Superior Performance and Added Features

Performance is, of course, also at the top of consumers' minds when shopping for a clothes washer. ENERGY STAR qualified clothes washers offer some technological advances that deliver high performance and help clothes last longer, get clothes cleaner and make doing the laundry faster and easier.

“With the cost of clothing today, everybody is looking for a machine that will prevent pilling, shrinking and fading,” Ruiz said. “Qualified machines cradle clothing, rather than beating it up,” he added, citing that most ENERGY STAR qualified washers have smooth stainless steel interiors helping prevent snagging. The clothing is cleaned with a gentle tumbling action, moving it through the water, rather than using a central agitator to push and pull garments through the water. In addition to preventing the pilling, shrinking and fading Ruiz mentioned, qualified washers also reduce rubbing and help prevent tears.

Boatman said machines that incorporate built-in water heaters and automatic water temperature controls are becoming increasingly popular with consumers as well. They improve energy efficiency by heating water to the proper temperature and delivering it to where it's needed quickly. They ensure the water is at the proper temperature while also getting clothes cleaner and keeping garments looking newer longer by maximizing the detergent's effectiveness and minimizing shrinking, fading and wrinkling.

Touchpad operation on some machines also takes the guesswork out of doing the laundry, Ruiz said. The consumer simply selects the button for the type of fabrics being washed and the machine automatically sets the right cycle. “In the past, people would just always select the ‘Normal’ cycle; You can't treat all fabrics the same way and expect the best results,” Ruiz added.

Eye-Catching Style for Today's More Elaborate Laundry Rooms

More homeowners today are choosing the convenience of placing laundry rooms on the main floor of the house. As a result, laundry rooms are larger and more elaborate – becoming a showcase of the homeowners' style.

“Washers and dryers have become appliances that homeowners want to show off, rather than hide in the basement,” Killgallon said. “Like a big-screen TV, they're almost a bragging point. They're neat to look at, are still perceived as new on the market, and they show that you're doing your part to protect the environment.”

“Color is also increasingly important,” Ruiz added, citing bisque, grey, titanium and stainless steel finishes as popular choices. “Since washers and dryers are no longer hidden in the basement, consumers are trying to coordinate the look of their laundry appliances with that of the kitchen appliances.”

On some models, the large dials used to operate the machine have been replaced with push buttons, giving the machines a sleek, contemporary look.

“Start the Savings Cycle” Program

Focus on Energy’s “Start the Savings Cycle” program will make it even easier for Wisconsin residents to save energy, water, money and time while doing the laundry. Eligible Wisconsin residents who purchase an ENERGY STAR qualified clothes washer from one of 350 participating retailers statewide will receive a Cash-Back Reward of \$50 or \$100, depending on the model purchased. Residents may choose among some of the nation’s best-known brands, including Maytag, Amana, Frigidaire, General Electric, Bosch, Asko, LG, Miele, Equator, Gibson, Imperial and White Westinghouse. The Cash-Back Rewards are available from April 15 through July 15.

For more information about ENERGY STAR qualified clothes washers and the “Start the Savings Cycle” promotion, including a list of participating retailers, call Focus on Energy at 800-762-7077 or visit www.focusonenergy.com.

About Focus on Energy

Focus on Energy is a public-private partnership offering energy information and services to energy utility customers throughout Wisconsin. The goals of this program are to encourage energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, enhance the environment and ensure the future supply of energy for Wisconsin. Since July 2001, the program has helped Wisconsin’s businesses and residents reduce their annual energy consumption by more than 304.3 million kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity and more than 13.7 million therms of natural gas. For more information, call 800-762-7077 or visit www.focusonenergy.com.

About ENERGY STAR

ENERGY STAR was introduced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 as a voluntary market-based partnership to reduce air pollution through increased energy efficiency. Today, with assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy, the ENERGY STAR program offers businesses and consumers energy efficient solutions to save energy, money and help protect the environment for future generations. More than 7,000 organizations have become ENERGY STAR partners and are committed to improving the energy efficiency of products, homes and businesses. For more information, visit www.energystar.gov or call 888-STAR-YES (888-782-7937).