

## **Energy Efficient Laundering**

For most of us, laundry is an arduous, endless chore. Separating, sorting, washing, rinsing, drying and folding are no fun. The tips that follow may not turn laundry into laugh-time, but they may at least show you how to feel a little better by making you a better steward of the environment.

Clothes washers and dryers use heaping amounts of energy through operation and heating. In fact, the water-heating process uses 90 percent of the energy used by a washing machine! Yet, there are steps you can take to reduce this massive energy use and to help improve the environment.

You can make the biggest improvement in energy conservation by purchasing an Energy Star® qualified washing machine. Energy-efficient washers use 35-50 percent less water and 50 percent less energy per load. This results in lower energy and water bills, and costs you less in detergent, too. Also, since energy-efficient models spin at a higher speed, extracting more water from the load, the drying time ends up being less than with normal machines.

In addition, front-loading, or horizontal-axis, washers are much more energy efficient than standard top-loading, or vertical-axis, machines. Front-loading models use about two-thirds less water and are said to clean clothes more thoroughly than conventional top-loading units. Front-loading machines also spin the clothes faster and remove more of the moisture content resulting in a shorter dryer time for the load. These machines not only reduce wear and tear on your clothes, but can also enable stacking of the washer and dryer, which is an invaluable space-saver for many homeowners.

If you are in the market for a new washer or dryer, take into consideration both the purchase and operational price tags of the machines. While the standard price tag reports the purchase price of the appliance, the second tag displays the cost of the energy needed to run that appliance for its lifetime. In some cases, energy-efficient models cost more to purchase than standard models, but the cost savings in energy bills, detergent and time can easily repay the initial investment.

If you cannot replace your machines with new units, there are methods you can use to reduce energy conservation with your standard appliances:

- make use of the cold/cold setting on your washer—this reduces the large energy consumption required for water heating
- use the lowest water level possible for loads
- insulate the pipes leading to the washer which will reduce the amount of heat that escapes during heating
- turn down the temperature of your water heater to 50 degrees Celsius/122 degrees Fahrenheit
- place your washer close to the water heater so the travel time and distance for hot water is not longer than necessary

Clothes dryers use large amounts of energy to dry loads of laundry and the energy efficiency of dryers varies very little. However, you can still save on energy use by making changes in the way you use your dryer's features.

First, look for a dryer that has an automatic shut-off feature, which means the machine shuts off automatically when clothes are dry. A dryer with an "end-cycle" tone or alert can also reduce unnecessary drying time. You may also choose to use the machine only until the clothes are damp, and then hang dry them for the remainder of time. This not only saves energy, but preserves the clothing. Lastly, using the permanent press or fluff option, which blows cool air on clothes, reduces wrinkles and, ultimately, eliminates the need for ironing, which also consumes energy. Some additional tips for energy-efficient drying are listed below:

- dry similar clothes together (bath towels, knits and synthetic materials all have different drying-time requirements)
- do not over dry clothes which wastes energy and damages clothing by causing shrinkage, more static electricity and increased wear and tear
- try drying loads one after the other to take advantage of heat remaining in the dryer
- do not overload the dryer which causes more energy use and uneven drying
- always clean the lint filter before every load and periodically check that the outside dryer vent is free from obstruction
- never add wet items to a dryer full of clothes that are nearly dry—this results in an overage of energy use
- lastly, consider installing a clothesline and naturally drying your clothes using the sun and wind

How does all this benefit the environment? In two ways: by reducing electricity consumption, the power plants that provide electricity generate less pollution. Second, using less fossil fuel increases the fuel supply for other purposes and reduces our reliance on foreign sources of energy.

These energy efficient laundry tips come to you from Clean Air Counts, a six-county Chicago regional initiative of the Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency – Region V, City of Chicago and Illinois EPA. It seeks significant reductions in smog-forming pollutants and energy consumption. For more energy savings and emission reduction tips or to become a participant, log on to [www.CleanAirCounts.org](http://www.CleanAirCounts.org).