

Clean, Green Washing Machine

BY PHIL BOGUCKI

For a powerful weapon against rising costs in water and energy, look to the laundry room.

Property managers are searching for every possible way to reduce energy and utility bills. One of the simplest, most effective solutions has been to go green and equip the community laundry areas with front-load washing machines. But the benefits are even more dramatic today because washing machines in 2007 must be more efficient than ever to qualify for ENERGY STAR® certification.

Washers and dryers consume a lot of energy and water, and older machines tend to be the biggest offenders. As a result, many local utility companies and laundry supplier partners are offering rebates to spur the replacement of older machines with high-efficiency equipment. These rebates can help to defray initial purchase or lease costs and save a community hundreds of dollars per machine.

While rebates provide substantial purchase savings, long-term reductions in water, sewer and energy costs will be even greater. Long-term savings plus revenue increases can reach well into five figures. To conform to the ENERGY STAR standards for 2007, machines must meet two criteria:

1. Modified Energy Factor. Modified Energy Factor (MEF) measures total energy consumption per cycle, including the dryer energy used to remove moisture in washed items. The higher the value, the more efficient the washer. Before 2007, the minimum MEF was 1.42. Now it's 1.72, which is a significant increase.

2. Water Factor. Water Factor is new to the ENERGY STAR formula. It measures the washer's water use in gallons per cycle per cubic foot. The lower the value, the more efficient the washer. Qualifying machines must have a maximum Water Factor of 8.0.

Based on national averages, a washer that meets these two criteria, running two cycles per day, could cut utility costs by approximately \$130 each year. Multiply that figure by the num-

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ber of machines in the community and the number of years the machines will be used, and the result is substantial savings. For example, 10 washers over the course of 10 years could save an apartment owner \$13,000.

Several manufacturers offer high-efficiency washing machines, and exact savings can vary

from company to company. But in all cases, these machines will cut a community's operating costs significantly. Also, apartment owners can gain benefits on the revenue side as well. Because most ENERGY STAR-qualified washers have more capacity than conventional washers, owners can charge a higher vend price to increase revenue.

Although top-load washers are less expensive to purchase and install, they are less efficient than front-load washers and will save less money beyond the short term because only certain cycles deliver the benefit. Apartment owners should specify front-load equipment in any laundry agreement. Using front-load equipment is a highly effective way to reduce water and energy costs and increase the profitability of any laundry operation—whether that operation is owned or leased.

Because the more efficient large-capacity machines let residents do more laundry in less time and clean bulky items more easily, residents generally favor them. The cleaning process is gentler because these washers have no agitator, so clothes tend to last longer. And because the washers extract much more water during the spin cycle, residents can save time on the drying. Machines also can be connected to the Internet, so residents can check availability and load status via computer, cell phone or PDA. As a result, resident acceptance is typically high, which in turn increases laundry room usage and profitability. ■

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