

KUNI Radio Series “Unplugged”
Show #28: 1993 Refrigerators

From the Center for Energy & Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa, this is Pat Higby with a series of programs on KUNI to help you save energy.

Do you remember 1993? That was the year of the Waco, Texas siege. Clinton was President, Ruth Bader Ginsburg was appointed to the Supreme Court, and Toni Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature. The movies to see were Schindler’s List, The Piano, and Philadelphia.

1993 was an important year for appliance efficiency. The National Appliance Energy Conservation Act was actually passed in 1987, but its strongest standards were updated in 1993. In 1992 the average refrigerator used about 1,725 kWh of electricity per year. In 1994 the average was 653! Today’s refrigerators use less than 500. What is truly amazing is that the average size has increased 10% and features such as automatic defrost and icemakers are more common. The savings in energy bills haven’t been updated with today’s higher energy costs, but are substantial! So are the reductions in carbon emissions.

So, if your refrigerator/freezer predates the Clinton administration, you have an energy hog in your kitchen! The sooner you replace it, the more you can save on your utility bill. While shopping it helps to make a list of the models, their cost, and the energy they use per year. That’s the number on the yellow Energy Guide label. You’ll probably notice that side-by-side units use 10 to 25 percent more energy. Bottom freezers with drawers rather than doors are most efficient. Cold air is very dense, and every time you open a refrigerator or freezer door, it cascades out like a waterfall! A drawer is more like a chest-type freezer, keeping the cold air inside while open.

Other features to look for are automatic moisture control. Your old energy hog uses an “anti-sweat” heater to prevent moisture on the door! Through-the-door water or ice dispensers can save energy because you don’t have to open the door, but they continuously use 14 to 20% more energy. If used infrequently, they should be avoided.

Wouldn’t it have been great if Congress had required cars to be as efficient as refrigerators?

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