



COLD CLIMATE HOUSING RESEARCH CENTER

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ENERGY FOCUS

(Some) Fishermen Benefit from Efficient Freezers

By Adam Wasch

I don't fish. I don't fish because fish depress me, particularly unhappy fish. In part, this has something to do with having once witnessed my father club a fish repeatedly, chasing it madly around and around a small unstable rented boat. By the time the fish succumbed, the boat's gunnels had dipped twice beneath the waterline. Our feet were soaked; the boat was sinking in Lake Erie.

Looming over the broken fish – one of its eyes fixed heavenward, the other lost – my father congratulated me for having reeled it in. Now resembling shoe leather, the fish was our only catch for the day. This mattered. "Too bad it's a junk fish," he said, throwing it back into the water. "They're no good for eating."

Alaskan fishing, no doubt, is a more fulfilling experience. You might catch so many fish this summer that you'd be wise to consider where you'll store it all. Freezers are a reliable choice. But what kind? Is one kind of freezer more efficient than another? Are there ways to optimize your freezer use? Well, of course. You don't think I'd write this column otherwise, do you?

The basics: Locate your freezer in a cool place away from sources of heat or sun. Porch freezers are handy, but at least try to keep them under an awning and out of the sun – not to mention dry. Don't open your freezer unless you have to – no jeering at your kill or reliving triumphant moments with the fillet.

Keep your freezer coils, which may be located behind or beneath the unit, free of debris and dog fur. Allow for good air flow around the freezer. Make sure your freezer door closes and that it seals well with good, clean door gaskets. Use the smallest freezer to suit your needs and keep it full – a full freezer will use less energy than a partially empty one. Set its thermostat at 0 degrees Fahrenheit – colder is unnecessary.

If your freezer is more than five years old and especially if it's older than 10 years, consider buying a new freezer. Due to better insulation and more efficient compressors, Energy Star rated units manufactured since 2001 use up to 40 percent less electricity than older models. Plus, federal rebates exist to help fund your new freezer purchase. Check out this handy calculator to estimate your possible savings: <http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?fuseaction=refrig.calculator>.

When buying new, you have some big decisions to make. Do you want an upright dedicated freezer or a chest freezer? If you're in the market for a refrigerator-freezer combo, do you want the freezer up top or on the bottom? Auto- or manual defrost?

A chest manual-defrosting freezer will be the most efficient option, especially if it is rarely opened. Cold air doesn't spill out of chest-style freezers like it does from upright units, resulting in up to a 25 percent energy savings.

Also, consider units that do not defrost automatically. Defrosting cycles are necessitated by the introduction of humid air to the inside of the freezer. If you don't open the freezer door often, chances are that you can get away with defrosting your unit annually by hand instead of employing a more energy-consuming automatic defrost system. Manual systems consume up to 40 percent less energy than automatic units.

I wish I could say whether freezer-refrigerator combination units are more efficient if the freezer section is located on the top instead of the bottom of unit, but this is a very controversial subject among appliance manufacturers and is subject to variables in materials and technology. Good thing appliances come with those handy Energy Star stickers to help you compare specific units' energy consumption.

As the next-to-last final resting place for your fish, freezers are an important factor in your home's energy use. May your fish be caught happily and plentifully. I'll be sticking to the hiking trails.

Adam Wasch promotes energy awareness for the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC).

For questions or comments please contact CCHRC at (907) 457-3454