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## ENERGY FOCUS

### Think Your Homepage is Cool? Check Out Energy Star's

Sometimes, I worry that the U.S. economy is in trouble because our gross national product is almost entirely comprised of web pages. I'd contribute by adding my own personal web page, but I'm afraid my lack of substance could trigger a full-blown depression. Some websites are pretty nifty, though. Like the one by the U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Star program.

Of course, you've heard of Energy Star. But it's worth a refresher to appreciate how successful the program with the ubiquitous labels has become and how it benefit consumers. The program began in 1992 as a way to highlight highly efficient appliances and other household products without mandating those efficiencies (the government does set efficiency baselines, but these are lower than the Energy Star program recognizes).

Because of the increased publicity afforded by the widely-promoted Energy Star label and advertisements, manufacturers have an incentive to meet Energy Star efficiency benchmarks. This is good for consumers and companies alike. The more than 40,000 Energy Star designated products are estimated to save Americans about \$16 billion in energy costs a year.

Energy Star labels are found on products such as kitchen appliances, windows, electronics, lighting, and heating and cooling systems. Whole houses or buildings may even be granted Energy Star recognition. There are so many Energy Star categories and products that you need to go to their website to wrap your head around it.

Buying a product displaying the Energy Star label does not necessarily mean that you are buying the most efficient product available, but you can be assured that you are buying one that leads in energy efficiency. For example, Energy Star labeled refrigerators that consume at least 20 percent less energy than other new refrigerators (and 40 percent less than those manufactured as recently as 2001); dishwashers, 40 percent less; electronics, 30 percent to 90 percent less; lighting, 75 percent less; and so on.

The Energy Star website is so cool that even people with personal lives might benefit from visiting it. There's a section where you can explore the full line of products verified by Energy Star. Plus, you can learn how to qualify for federal tax credits, receive rebates, and construct an Energy Star recognized home – this includes graphic tour of key efficiency features. My favorite section of the website is the "Home Improvement" area. Here are handy automated advisors offering customized plans for increasing the energy efficiency of your home, savings calculators, and tips on how to weatherize your

house. There's even a fun interactive model home that can help you (and the kids in your life) learn all about energy-saving opportunities in your home.

Whether you want to familiarize yourself with current building technologies, research your next appliance purchase, or help your child with his or her science homework, the Energy Star website is informative and fun. I'm not sure that I'm so excited about energy efficiency that I'd download an Energy Star podcast, but they're available, too.

Have you found a website on energy efficiency that you think is great? Email me. I could use the content.

*Visit the U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Star website at:*

<http://www.energystar.gov/>