California Targets TVs to Lower Electricity Demand

SACRAMENTO, Calif. - The most power-hungry television sets could soon be banned from store shelves in California as state energy regulators on Wednesday consider a first-in-the nation mandate intended to lower electricity demand.

If adopted, the regulations will require televisions sold in California to be more energy efficient beginning in 2011. The requirement would be tougher in 2013, with only one-quarter of the TVs on the market currently meeting that standard.

Energy commissioners say TVs account for about 10 percent of a home's electricity use. The concern is that the energy draw will rise by as much as 8 percent a year as consumers buy larger televisions, add more to their homes and watch them longer.

Some manufacturers say implementing a power standard will cripple innovation, limit consumer choice and harm California retailers because consumers could simply buy TVs out of state or order them online.

The standards would apply to all TVs up to 58 inches, allowing increasing power use for larger TVs.

For example, all new 42-inch television sets must use less than 183 watts by 2011 and less than 116 watts by 2013. That's considerably more efficient than flat-screen TVs placed on the market in recent years.

A 42-inch Hitachi plasma TV sold in 2007 uses 313 watts while a 42-inch Sharp Liquid-crystal display, or LCD, TV draws 232 watts, according to Energy Commission research. LCDs now account for about 90 percent of the 4 million TVs sold in California annually.

Industry representatives have said the standards would force manufacturers to make televisions that have poorer picture quality and fewer features than those sold elsewhere in the U.S.

California has previously led the nation in setting efficiency requirements for dishwashers, washing machines and other household appliances as a way to address the state's growing electricity demand.

Utilities and environmental groups say the TV standards should head off steep increases in home electricity use and rising electric bills.

An energy-efficient TV would save a household roughly $30 a year per set in lowered electricity costs. If all 35 million TVs watched in the state were replaced

with more efficient sets, Californians would save $8.1 billion over 10 years, according to the Energy Commission report.

The standard also could help California meet the goals of its 2006 global warming law, which calls for the state to cut greenhouse gases 25 percent by 2020.

TVs larger than 58 inches would not be covered under the rule, a concession to independent retailers that sell high-end home-theater TVs. Those sets account for no more than 3 percent of the market.

Commissioners are expected to regulate them in the future.

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