

## The Wash of the Future

BY RANDY F. RADTKE

**Stricter energy standards are prompting commercial laundry providers to do more with less.**

Whether it's choosing higher quality windows and insulation for a newly constructed community or something as simple as retrofitting an existing property with low-flow shower heads, apartment owners continue to place heavy emphasis on improved efficiency. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has taken that practice even further in 2007.

New efficiency standards for commercial clothes washers took effect Jan. 1. Those standards apply to washers designed for use by more than one household, such as those installed in community laundry rooms in apartment communities and universities.

New commercial washer standards impact horizontal axis machines with a capacity not more than 3.5 cubic feet (4.0 cubic feet for vertical axis washers) produced starting this year. Previously installed machines are exempt, and washers carrying a 2006 production date also still may be sold. The codes essentially set a unified efficiency mark versus leaving the matter up to individual states to develop their own guidelines.

Gary Ziesemer, Product Manager at Alliance Laundry Systems, said manufacturers faced a challenge with the new tougher guidelines.

"It means striving to maintain the same washing performance with a lot less water," Ziesemer said.

### Setting the Standards

The DOE standards call for a minimum modified energy factor (MEF) of at least 1.26 and a water factor (WF) of not



Laundry rooms like the one at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. (above), must comply with the new Department of Energy standards, which took effect Jan. 1, 2007.

## What's Trendy in Appliances

BY ZISH TROCKI

Consumers and technology are two major factors that determine appliance trends. Much has changed in consumer wants and desires that drive appliance trends, although surprisingly much has stayed the same. Consumers still want labor- and time-saving appliances.

They want them to do more for less and to be more convenient to use. Technologically, appliances are becoming smarter, without necessarily making consumers feel inferior while trying to use them, and they have more features than consumers can reasonably use.

Front-load washing machines have become more popular, even at premium prices, saving half or more in laundry supplies, water and energy expenses. Refrigerators are better insulated, and some have European curves, both of which have added interior storage space without an overall larger exterior presence than earlier models.

The industry has yet to see a cresting of the stainless steel look. Though still very popular, vari-

ations are evident. The classic finish is yielding to designs that incorporate glass or black accents, which satisfy the variation in consumer perception or taste. Stainless steel is being married with warmer colors in the kitchen to create a more natural and inviting look. Other manufacturers that fabricate usual-looking consumer appliances have added more substantial-looking, professional, higher-end models, according to the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers.

Black and white combinations are gaining more attention, in addition to deeper color variations of red or orange. Even blue is influencing the appliance scene. The largest national appliance retailer is reacting to the color trends with front-load washers and dryers sporting colors like Sedona, champagne and Pacific blue, which joined existing graphite, bisque and white models.

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23.7 gallons per cycle.

Another change residents will notice among most manufacturers will be automatic temperature controls that meter the hot water fill to exact amounts to reduce energy consumption.

With less thermal energy being input, reliance on mechanical motion will be more important. In addition, Ziesemer said that soap manufacturers are making detergents that are more active in cold water.

### Catalysts to Change

While manufacturers implementing changes in designs to meet new DOE standards will translate into cost increases, there are incentives to upgrade efficiency.

"Some local utility companies are providing rebates to stimulate purchase of high-efficiency equipment," Casey said, adding that in some municipalities, the rebates can total a couple hundred dollars per machine.

Apartment owners also can realize savings through using a community laundry room with service provided by route operators. For instance, a top-loader using a water-saver cycle conserves roughly 9.8 gallons of water per wash cycle. With an average of 2.2 turns or uses per day, that one machine could save about 7,800 gallons of water annually.

Casey stressed that property owners working with a qualified route operator can transform the efficiency of a community laundry room, and also develop it as an element that helps attract new residents and retain current ones.

"Today's laundry room has to evolve into a living area residents feel comfortable in," he said. Some owners have had success locating the laundry adjacent to pools or fitness areas, which allows residents to multitask, he said. ■

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more than 9.5. MEF refers to the washer's cubic foot capacity divided by its energy consumption, with a higher number being more efficient. Previously, the standard was set at 1.04. WF relates to the total weighted water consumption divided by washer capacity, with a lower number being more efficient.

"This is the first time there's ever been a water factor standard for commercial washers," said Dick Casey, Director of Multihousing Sales for Speed Queen and member of the Multi-housing Laundry Association (MLA) Board of Directors, which urged the DOE to not tighten the standards.

To earn the Energy Star qualified designation, commercial clothes washers will need to have an MEF of at least 1.72 and a water factor of 8.0 or less. Although the latest requirements rein in water consumption in commercial washers, no water factor is in place for in-unit machines.

"In-unit washers have no water regulations and can be water guzzlers, using

50 to 55 gallons per cycle," Casey said.

A major part of the MLA's argument against tougher standards centered on the small number of residential-sized commercial machines sold annually compared to non-commercial units. Thus, savings could be minimal in relation to the total number of home-style units sold and might push owners toward cheaper, less efficient in-unit washers.

### More With Less

The new standards mean companies are pressed to fine-tune their processes to produce the same high-level washing results customers expect.

"It gives manufacturers a challenge to meet new standards, especially for commercial top-load washers," Ziesemer said. He said one way to help meet the standards is through a "water-saver" cycle that reduces the rinse fill with new wash water in the top-loader. The water-saver cycle also keeps water consumption to