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State may push for TVs to use half the energy

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California regulators, concerned over the proliferation of flat-panel television sets that guzzle electricity, could soon impose first-in-the-nation laws that restrict how much power televisions can consume.

In some cases, televisions use more energy than refrigerators, regulators said during a legislative hearing Wednesday on a proposal to force television manufacturers to cut the power TVs use in California in half by 2013.

The proposed regulation faces strong opposition by many manufacturers but has the support of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and utility companies, among others.

The flat-panel LCD and plasma televisions that have effectively replaced most other types of TVs use significantly more energy than older TV sets. The California Energy Commission estimates the regulations would save consumers \$50 to \$250 on power costs over the life of a television, while also conserving power.

Proponents and opponents of the regulations debated the actual savings of the state efficiency standards at Wednesday's hearing and discussed whether they could be achieved through market forces instead of government mandate.

The California Energy Commission is considering public comment on the regulations and could vote on them as soon as Nov. 4.

Hidden cost

Karen Douglas, chairman of the commission, said energy use is a "completely hidden cost" for consumers buying televisions.

"Right now, without standards in place, what we're getting is increasing energy use," Douglas said. The regulations also would require labeling on televisions showing wattage use.

Schwarzenegger said this week he backs the proposed regulations. "We should go in that direction

and should encourage the manufacturers to go in that direction because the technology is available," the governor said, adding later that it is important to give television-makers enough time to meet any new standard. Energy consumption by televisions can vary widely for sets that are the same size.

Many manufacturers have opposed the regulation, saying it will mean job and tax revenue losses as consumers look outside the state to buy the televisions they want. They also warn that it will stifle innovation and prefer that market forces lead to more efficient televisions.

"Voluntary efforts are succeeding without these artificial limits," said Douglas Johnson, senior director for technology policy at the Consumer Electronics Association, which represents most manufacturers. He called the estimated energy savings "grandiose."

Two-step process

The regulation would take effect in two steps, beginning in 2011 and stepping up in 2013, eventually cutting the use of power by 50 percent, according to the California Energy Commission. More than 1,000 television models on the market already meet the first-tier standard while just under 300 models, or about a quarter of TVs on the market, meet the second-tier standards.

Televisions with screens larger than 58 inches are exempt from the regulation for now.

Consumers should expect to save money on their energy bills, regulators said. Those savings would be an average of about \$18.50 per year for TVs meeting the 2011 standards and additional \$11.76 per year on average for the 2013 standards, according to the energy commission.

In addition, the standards would reduce energy use by 6,515 gigawatt hours per year, or enough electricity to power the cities of Anaheim, Burbank, Glendale and Palo Alto combined for a year. That would lower greenhouse gas emissions by 3.1 million metric tons per year, according to the commission. All major utility companies in California, including Pacific Gas and Electric Co., support the regulations.

Public comment

The California Energy Commission is accepting comments on the proposed regulation through Nov. 2.

To comment, send an e-mail to: docket@energy.state.ca.us and refer to docket No. 09-AAER-1C.

Savings plan

In 2013, the regulations, if adopted, will:

Conserve 6,515 gigawatt hours of electricity per year - enough to power Anaheim, Burbank, Glendale and Palo Alto.

Save typical consumers just over \$30 per year in energy costs.

Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by

3.1 million metric tons annually.

Source: California Energy Commission

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