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California may pull the plug on power-guzzling flat-screen TVs

The California Energy Commission next week takes up new energy efficiency standards for flat-screen TVs sold in the state.

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SAN FRANCISCO

The state that first championed the ban on energy-hogging refrigerators in the 1970s now has its sights set on power-hungry TVs.

The California Energy Commission (CEC) could adopt new efficiency standards for televisions with screens smaller than 58 inches as early as next week. If the commission OKs [the requirement at its Nov. 4 meeting](#), TVs sold in the state will have to be 33 percent more efficient by 2011 and consume 49 percent less energy by 2013.

The move is meant to curtail on the amount of electricity used to fuel Californians' TV habit, which has been growing as consumers continue to buy larger and cheaper flat-screen sets that use more power. Televisions and their various accessories – such as DVD players and cable boxes – now account for about 10 percent of an average home's electric bill in California.

"Electricity use by televisions is growing," says Adam Gottlieb, CEC spokesman. "Two percent of the state's energy consumption goes to power televisions."

In the end, says Mr. Gottlieb, compelling manufacturers to sell more energy-efficient TVs will amount to saving consumers and the state a lot of money. He says it will conserve enough electricity to power 864,000 homes annually and add up to \$8.1 billion in savings over the next decade.

While [environmentalists](#) are applauding the move and some [manufacturers](#) have backed the proposed standards, the Consumer Electronics Associations, a trade group, is steadfast in its opposition.

It says the regulations would cost California \$50 million in lost tax revenues, due to the drop in TV sales, and result in 4,600 lost jobs.

"The consumer electronics industry is committed to achieving energy efficiency in ways that benefit consumers and inspire innovation. The CEC's proposal to eliminate consumer choice and remove 25 percent of televisions from the market is a job killer and does not benefit consumers," it said in a [statement](#).

The CEC standards will not apply to sets larger than 58 inches partly as a concession to the industry, says Gottlieb. But more than 1,000 models smaller than 58 inches are already on the market that meet the new efficiency guidelines, he adds.

"This is not banning products. The TVs that people will be able to buy will be more energy efficient and save them money," he says.

[The Kansas City Star](#) reported recently that the surge in television sales is being fueled by less expensive sets and the recent national switch to digital broadcasting. Market analyst Tamaryn Pratt told the paper, "Here we are in a terrible economic time and the demand for TVs of all kinds has grown incredibly."

In California, consumers buy about 4 million televisions a year.

Back in 2005, [the Monitor reported](#) that TV energy was expected to "reach about 70 billion kilowatt-hours per year nationwide" in 2009 – about 50 percent higher than the usage in 2005.

"Bigger screens aren't the only culprits for TV's growing energy draw. The nation's move to high-definition TV, or HDTV, requires sets to deliver more picture clarity, which draws more power," the article explained.

Manufacturers resisted, too, when California placed tighter restrictions on refrigerators in 1978, Gottlieb said. But today, he says, the typical fridge is larger than its avocado-colored ancestor and uses 25 percent less energy.

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