

New pay-TV boxes to save money with lower energy costs

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Pay TV set-top boxes, often one of the biggest energy hogs in U.S. homes because they never power down, may become more efficient and save consumers money under an industry agreement announced Thursday.

By January 2014, more than 90 percent of these boxes will meet the U.S. government's [Energy Star](#) 3.0 requirements, according to the voluntary five-year accord by 15 device manufacturers as well as cable, satellite and phone providers. Because Energy Star boxes use at least 30 percent less power, the companies expect annual savings of \$1.5 billion.

"This is significant," said Doug Johnson of the [Consumer Electronics Association](#), which co-announced the initiative with the National Cable & Telecommunications Association. He says the new set-top boxes will not only reduce energy costs for [consumers](#) but also reduce service calls for providers, because they won't heat up as much and will thus last longer.

The boxes, which are losing popularity as more people watch TV online or via video game consoles, are costly to operate. The reason's simple: unlike cellphones, they don't power down when not in use. Hitting the off button dims the clock or display but rarely reduces power use, and unplugging a digital video recorder, or DVR, slashes energy use but won't record TV shows.

They cost \$3 billion in 2010 to operate, two-thirds of which was wasted

because they were connected but weren't being used, according to a 2011 report by the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group. The report said new DVRs use more energy than a new 42-inch flat-panel TV and half the energy of a new Energy Star refrigerator.

Noah Horowitz, NRDC senior scientist, calls the announcement "a far cry from what is needed to significantly decrease the \$2 billion worth of electricity these devices waste each year." He sees it as effort to avoid government regulation but says the only way to ensure the industry does what it promises is for the U.S. government to set a minimum efficiency standard similar to that for TVs.

He says Americans don't realize just how much the boxes are costing them, adding: "Imagine the outrage one would have if your car continued to run after you took the key out."

Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who called on the industry last year to take action, applauded the initiative but said she hopes the boxes will also meet stricter Energy Star 4.0 standards that are slated to take effect in July 2013.

Under the accord, which takes effect in January, cable operators say they will download "light sleep" capabilities to more than 10 million DVRs already in homes. Phone and satellite providers will also begin offering such features, which cut power usage. Participants agree to test a "deep sleep" function, which makes deeper cuts. British Sky Broadcasting' offers "light" and "deep" sleep options on its new boxes.

The 15 companies that signed on to the agreement: Comcast, DirecTV, DISH Network, Time Warner Cable, Cox; Verizon, Charter, AT&T, Cablevision, Bright House Networks and CenturyLink, along with manufacturers Cisco, Motorola, EchoStar Technologies and ARRIS.

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