



How to read appliance energy labels

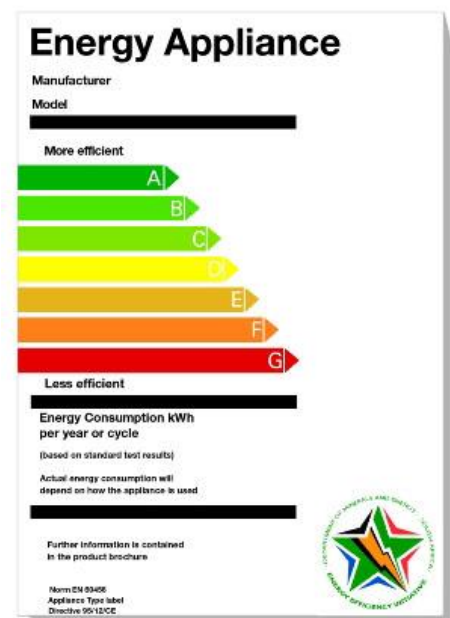
Any manufacturer can claim that their appliance is ‘energy efficient’, but you should look for independent verification. The three most common energy labels on appliances in South Africa are better guides to help you choose truly economical models.

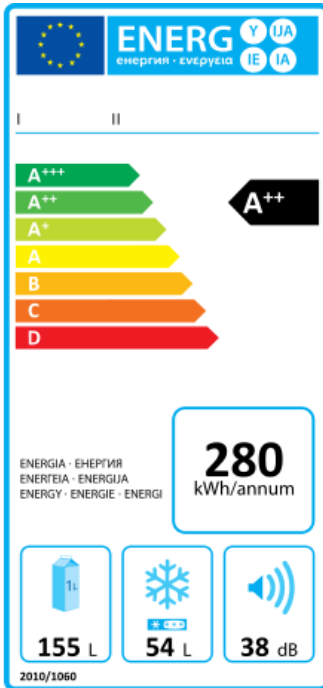
South African energy label

Energy labels are optional for appliances manufactured in South Africa. Goods with no label could be inefficient appliances that will cost you more in the long run. If you don't see a label, ask the sales person or try to find the rating by Googling the model. You can do it with a smartphone at the shop or research it before you go.

The current South African label gives a rating from A down to G – with A being the best – for refrigerators, dishwashers, washing machines and electric ovens. For most appliances, insist on an A-rated appliance, they are not difficult to find. (Old refrigerators in your house may be the inefficient equal of a G-rated fridge.)

In addition to the letter rating, the label should carry an energy consumption number in kilowatt hours. It is often more useful to compare this number between models than to compare the letter rating.





European Union energy label

This label is seen mostly on imported appliances that are also sold in Europe. It looks very similar to the South African label, which is based upon the EU model. And the standards are similar, so a B-rating on an EU label is equal to a B-rating on an SA label.

But one important difference makes the EU label more helpful in finding the most energy-efficient appliances. The EU has added higher grades as appliances have become more efficient, all the way up to A+++. An energy rating of A or even A+ is becoming average among appliances sold in Europe, so aim for something with an even higher rating, if available. (SA labels with higher grades are being planned for release in the future.)

The EU label may include extra information – depending upon the appliance – such as water consumption or noise levels measured in decibels (dB).

Energy Star

The blue Energy Star label system was developed in the United States of America but it is used in many other countries. In South Africa, it mostly appears on imported computers and peripherals. If you choose a device with an Energy Star label or mark on the box, you can be assured that it is fairly efficient. The label provides no further grading, however, so you can't use the label to compare efficiency between two Energy Star devices to see which is better.



How to use Energy Labels for particular appliances

Refrigerators

Energy labels are most useful for refrigerators. Don't buy a refrigerator that does not have a South African or EU label. South African labels currently only go up to A, while EU labels go as high as A+++. But look beyond the letter; read the numbers, because you may find that a smaller fridge with an A uses less energy than a larger fridge with an A+. The estimated kWh/annum matters most. This is what you can expect the fridge to use in a year. If you know your R/kWh tariff – probably well over R1/kWh – you can quickly calculate your savings per year for choosing a more efficient fridge.

Washing machines

South African and EU energy labels on washing machines only compare how much electricity they use on hot washes. So if you plan to save the most energy by running cold-water washing cycles, the labels aren't very useful. Any machine is quite efficient with cold water, so it is more important to make certain that the machine you choose has a 20° or cold-water setting.

If you have a good reason to wash in hot water, such as cloth nappies, look for at least an A+ machine. If you use a tumble drier, a fast spin setting on the washing machine can reduce the amount of time and energy needed to dry your clothes.

Tumble driers

Tumble driers are just not very energy efficient- sadly there is just no way around that fact. Energy Star doesn't even bother testing them for the blue label. Most energy rated tumble driers get a C. The most efficient choice of tumble drier is no tumble drier. If you need one, however, make sure it at least has a moisture sensor and try to use it as little as possible.

Dishwashers

The labels compare electricity consumption on the 'standard' temperature setting. An 'A' rating is now average, so aim for an A+ or higher dishwasher, if available. And look beyond the ratings too. An 'Eco' or 35° degree setting will help you save more energy. The power drying option wastes a lot of electricity, so a dishwasher without a 'dry' button is better – or you can just remember to leave it off.

Ovens

EU and SA labels are available on ovens, but they are often not displayed. If you can find an EU label, in addition to the letter grade look for a kWh figure for the electricity used per 'cycle'. This will show you how much electricity is required to heat up the oven. Generally, convection ovens use less electricity because the heat is better distributed by the fan, and self-cleaning ovens are often more efficient because they are better insulated. Smaller ovens also use less electricity than larger ones.

Televisions

South Africa does not have energy labels for televisions, and EU or Energy Star labels are often not displayed, but don't worry. An energy label is not essential to choose an efficient TV. Because an A-rated large TV will use more energy than an A-rated small TV, it is more important to check the wattage. Most TVs list their wattage at the back. And if you can't find the wattage, as long as you avoid plasma TVs and buy an LED TV that is not larger than you need, it should be fairly energy efficient. Size matters. TVs are measured in inches on the diagonal, from corner to corner of the screen. For every 10 inches larger, an LED TV will use at least a third more electricity. LED TVs in the 40 to 50 inch range should use about 50 watts or less.