

Highlights of [GAO-13-135](#), a report to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government has established three key programs to encourage energy efficiency in household appliances and consumer electronics sold in the United States: (1) federal minimum efficiency standards, led by DOE; (2) EnergyGuide, which requires product labeling and is led by the FTC; and (3) Energy Star, a voluntary labeling program led by EPA.

Pub. L. No. 111-139 requires GAO to annually identify programs, agencies, offices, and initiatives with duplicative goals and activities. In response to this mandate, the objectives for this report are to: (1) examine these three programs' approaches to improving the energy efficiency of household appliances and consumer electronics and the scope of products they cover, and (2) determine to what extent, if any, federal programs to foster energy efficiency for these products are fragmented, overlapping, or duplicative. GAO reviewed relevant legislation and program documents and spoke with staff at the agencies about each of the programs, and to stakeholders, including manufacturers.

What GAO Recommends

To limit the potential for duplication in the current Energy Star verification testing activities, GAO recommends that EPA take steps to better communicate to DOE the models selected for testing so DOE can avoid testing the same ones. DOE and EPA acknowledged the importance of coordination, but EPA disagreed with the draft recommendation, citing concerns it could be labor intensive to implement. GAO revised the recommendation to clarify EPA's flexibility in implementing it.

View [GAO-13-135](#). For more information, contact Frank Rusco at (202) 512-3841 or ruscof@gao.gov.

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ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Better Coordination among Federal Programs Needed to Allocate Testing Resources

What GAO Found

The three key federal energy efficiency programs—minimum energy efficiency standards led by the Department of Energy (DOE), EnergyGuide led by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), and Energy Star led by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with support from DOE—take different approaches to the shared goal of improving the energy efficiency of selected categories of household appliances and consumer electronics. The scope of products covered by these three programs also varies, and a number of products are covered by only one program, while others are covered by two or all three. Examples are as follows:

- Minimum energy efficiency standards establish a national minimum level of energy efficiency for selected categories of products and are designed to eliminate the least efficient products from the marketplace. These standards currently apply to 33 categories of products, including refrigerators and dishwashers.
- EnergyGuide provides information displayed on a label attached to selected products that enables consumers to compare the estimated energy cost and energy consumption of different models within a given product category. EnergyGuide covers 16 such product categories, including televisions and dishwashers.
- Energy Star identifies the most energy efficient models within a given category of products. Manufacturers of qualifying products can display an Energy Star label on their products that is widely recognized by buyers as an indication of energy efficiency. The program also encourages manufacturers to improve energy efficiency of some models so that those models qualify for the Energy Star label. Energy Star covers 37 such product categories, including televisions and washing machines.

Federal programs to increase the energy efficiency of household appliances and consumer electronics are fragmented and overlapping, with one area of duplication. The programs are fragmented in that three federal agencies are addressing the same broad area of national need—improving energy efficiency. The programs are overlapping in that they target similar users—consumers. While fragmentation and overlap may result in duplication of resources, GAO found that these three programs are not broadly duplicative because they are not engaged in the same activities and do not provide the same services; however, GAO identified one duplicative activity within Energy Star. Specifically, GAO identified duplication in some testing activities undertaken to verify that products meet the criteria for carrying the Energy Star label. EPA and DOE each manage separate verification testing programs and, while the agencies coordinate to minimize duplication, GAO found 11 instances in which identical models had been tested twice in the same year—about 1 percent of the products tested. This duplication occurred because EPA does not communicate to DOE about some models that have been selected for testing until after the tests are complete; therefore, some models were tested twice while other models went untested. As a result, the agencies cannot ensure that scarce testing resources are maximized, either by eliminating unnecessary duplicative testing, or reallocating resources toward testing additional products.