

Appliances Go High Tech

Jeff Hall, general manager of Bob Wallace Appliance Sales and Service in Huntsville, Ala., says Whirlpool and General Electric are the two major manufacturers that he's aware of that are in extensive testing mode with Smart Grid technology. An influx of electronics are making more features possible for appliances that only work on the most efficient times and they may also generate their own electricity. "The first appliance I heard of like this is the hot water heater," he says. Refrigerators will soon be programmable to ensure they don't defrost in peak energy use times, which is this appliance's biggest consumption of power. Hall and other distributors say more customers are looking for energy efficient appliances, and the most common examples of energy savers are in the laundry category. While a traditional washer can use up to 40 gallons of water, today's high efficiency, front loader models use around 13 gallons. They also spin out at a higher speed, which removes more water out of the clothing and lowers drying time. These models range in price from \$899 to \$3,800, but they also help pay for themselves by lowering electricity or gas costs. Hall says consumers can save \$30 to \$50 a month in utility costs, adding that doesn't include the savings on heating less water in washing. Manufacturers estimate a washer will last 10 to 13 years, and consumers are likely to recover the cost of the machine within five to seven years. Hall says consumers' first preference is high efficiency and the second is capacity when it comes to laundry.

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