



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 20, 2023

After Gas Stoves, Biden Targets Dishwashers

[Gas stoves](#) aren't the only household appliance the Biden administration is seeking to regulate out of existence. The administration's proposed dishwasher standards would make those labor-saving devices both more costly and less effective, while having next to no impact on so-called climate change.

The Department of Energy (DOE) in May published a [255-page document](#) proposing new energy-efficiency standards for dishwashers. The DOE [estimated](#) that the new rule, which would take effect in 2027, will "save consumers nearly \$3 billion in utility bill savings over the ensuing 30 years of shipments and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 12.5 million metric tons." Much of the utility savings would come from an estimated 240-billion-gallon reduction in water usage.

The administration is taking on a [wide range of appliances](#), from refrigerators to ceiling fans, as part of its attempt to combat what President Joe Biden, in a 2021 [executive order](#), called "a profound climate crisis."

When it comes to dishwashers, industry and consumer groups disagree with the administration's rosy portrayal of its proposed rule. Nineteen of them, led by the Competitive Enterprise Institute (CEI), filed a [comment](#) on the DOE's proposal Tuesday contending that "the standards currently in effect are causing serious problems for consumers" and that "the proposed rule would exacerbate these problems."

The coalition wrote:

While each of the Biden administration's recently-proposed appliance measures raises a unique set of risks for consumers, the proposed dishwasher rule at issue here is particularly harmful. As it is, the existing energy and water efficiency measures for dishwashers have led to widespread and well-documented dissatisfaction over cycle times that have more than doubled from about an hour to two or more. The proposal to tighten these provisions would very likely make things worse. Further, since the existing energy and water limits are already quite stringent, the proposal to tighten them would generate very little marginal savings.

Indeed, as CEI's Ben Lieberman noted in a [blog post](#), the DOE expects its rule to save consumers a whopping \$17 over the 15.2-year lifespan of the average dishwasher, or about \$1.12 a year.



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“Against this miniscule [sic] benefit,” he continued, “is the very real risk of greatly diminished performance and convenience for consumers.” Besides the extra cycle time, “many consumers complain about having to rinse dishes before or after running them in the dishwasher in order to get them sufficiently clean, or running the machine twice. Beyond the extra annoyance, having to rewash dishes undercuts the energy and water-savings rationale behind the rules.”

Moreover, the increased cost of dishwashers that could result from the new rule would likely price some consumers out of the market, producing the opposite of the administration’s desired results. When the Obama administration [proposed](#) its second round of dishwasher regulations in 2015 — which, fortunately, it chose not to implement — the George Washington University Regulatory Studies Center reported that “individuals who forgo purchasing a dishwasher because of higher upfront costs will use between 67 and 210 percent more energy and between 250 and 450 percent more water.”

The dishwasher industry is also expected to suffer because of the rule. The DOE estimates that the industry could lose as much as 19 percent of its value over 30 years — a small price to pay, apparently, for staving off “climate change.”

Yet even if the administration’s expectations for carbon emissions turned out to be accurate, the rule would have a negligible effect on global temperatures. “According to estimates from Dr. Kevin Dayaratna of the Heritage Foundation,” wrote Lieberman, “the agency’s estimated reductions in greenhouse gases from the rule would prevent 0.0003°C warming by 2050.”

On top of all that, the coalition observed in its comment, the Energy and Policy Conservation Act of 1975 (EPCA), which authorizes the Secretary of Energy to promulgate energy- and water-conservation standards for household appliances,

makes clear that the agency must not prioritize efficiency above all else in the standards-setting process. Instead, the statute contains a number of provisions protecting consumers from excessively stringent standards that may do more harm than good.

Most relevant here is the provision in the law, hereinafter the “features provision,” which categorically prohibits any new or amended standard if the Secretary finds, by a preponderance of evidence, that it is “likely to result in the unavailability in the United States ... of performance characteristics (including reliability), features, sizes, capacities, and volumes that are substantially the same as those generally available in the United States at the time of the Secretary’s finding.” This provision prohibits setting an efficiency standard so stringent that it ... would sacrifice any desired product characteristics.

Of course, as the coalition pointed out, this “provision has already been flouted by previous” DOE dishwasher regulations, but that does not justify a repeat performance.

“Instead of ... making things worse by cranking out another round of restrictions, DOE should be looking for ways to fix the problems with existing dishwasher rules,” argued Lieberman. The Trump administration, at CEI’s request, initiated such a process. “Unfortunately,” penned Lieberman, “the Biden DOE shut down this effort, but 13 state attorneys general are fighting back by suing the agency in federal court.”

Preventing the imposition of more-stringent standards, or even devising less-stringent ones, would certainly be preferable to doing as the Biden administration desires. But the best course of action would



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be to scrap all dishwasher regulations and repeal the EPCA, which has no constitutional basis for existing in the first place.



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