



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

Since 2006, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General has conducted three evaluations of selected aspects of the ENERGY STAR program. This report summarizes past findings that remain relevant and identifies design and management challenges that present risks to the program's integrity as a means of greenhouse gas avoidance and as a credible tool to promote energy efficiency and consumer savings.

Background

ENERGY STAR is a voluntary program designed to help businesses and individuals enhance their energy efficiency. In 1996, EPA partnered with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) to promote the ENERGY STAR label and broaden the product coverage.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional, Public Affairs and Management at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2011/20101028-11-P-0010.pdf

ENERGY STAR Label Needs to Assure Superior Energy Conservation Performance

What We Found

EPA's implementation of the ENERGY STAR program has become inconsistent with the program's authorized purpose: to achieve environmental benefits by identifying and promoting energy-efficient products and practices that meet the highest energy conservation standards. We believe the ENERGY STAR program has sought to maximize the number of qualified products available at the expense of identifying products and practices that maximize energy efficiency.

We previously found that EPA could not assure that the purchase of ENERGY STAR products and adoption of ENERGY STAR practices actually deliver the energy or greenhouse gas emission savings that EPA reports annually, or that consumers are purchasing the most energy-efficient products on the market. We found that the design and execution of the ENERGY STAR program ensured neither the integrity of the label nor the achievement of greenhouse gas emission savings. Products historically qualified for the ENERGY STAR label based on manufacturer self-certification rather than EPA testing.

In 2009, EPA and DOE signed a new memorandum of understanding to enhance and expand federal programs that advance energy efficiency. These enhancements include adding new product categories to the program, instituting new measures to ensure that ENERGY STAR specifications are tightened as necessary to consistently represent top performing products, and enhancing the qualification and verification testing of ENERGY STAR products. Because these changes have not yet occurred, their effectiveness remains to be determined.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation develop a strategic vision and program design that assures that the ENERGY STAR label represents superior energy conservation performance. We also recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation develop a set of goals and valid and reliable measures that can accurately inform shareholders and the public of the benefits of the program. EPA disagreed with many of our conclusions, but concurred with the proposed recommendations. Based on the Agency's comments to our draft report, we changed our first recommendation to assure that the Agency's strategic vision and design complies with the intent of the Energy Policy Act of 2005.