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THE COLD FACTS

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Column: At Home With ATCO

Buying a new refrigerator or freezer today means more than simply choosing 'white' or 'almond.'

"There are so many different styles and options available for consumers that sometimes it's hard to know which one to choose," says Mark Antonuk of ATCO EnergySense.

So how do you choose? Here's some advice.

REFRIGERATORS: There are three models of refrigerators available today: top-freezer, bottom-freezer or side-by-side.

- Top-freezer models are generally less expensive to buy and operate. Traditionally, they have been the most popular model. They range in width from 60 to 90 cm (24 to 36 inches) and offer easy accessibility to freezer contents.

- Bottom-freezer models are a growing part of the market. At about 18 to 22 cubic feet in capacity, these refrigerators tend to provide less capacity than top-freezer models, but offer added convenience by having the most frequently used items at eye level.

- Side-by-side models offer easy access to both the main compartment and freezer level, and are generally large, ranging from 76 to 90 cm (30 to 36 inches) wide. More capacity goes to freezer space in this model. While they tend to offer more features, they also tend to be more expensive and less space and energy-efficient than top and bottom-freezer models.

Up to one-fifth of a home's annual electricity consumption can be attributed to the refrigerator, so replacing an aging model with a more energy-efficient one is a good investment. New standards in effect since 2001 require refrigerators to be 30 per cent more efficient than in the past. For additional savings, look for models with the Energy Star designation - these models are the most energy efficient on the market. To compare the energy efficiency of different models, use the energy usage information provided on the yellow EnerGuide sticker - the lower the number, the more energy efficient the unit is. According to Consumer Reports, energy efficiency varies among refrigerators.

"Usually an efficient model that costs more is a better buy in the long run than a cheaper but less-efficient model," says Antonuk

FREEZERS: When your food storage needs outgrow the freezer compartment in your refrigerator, you may want to purchase a stand-alone freezer. Freezers come in two styles - chest (box-like with an

upward-opening door) and upright (like a single-door refrigerator). They range in size from four to 25 cubic feet, and include variable features such as adjustable shelves and bins.

- Chest freezers are very energy efficient and cost the least to operate. They require no fan to circulate the cold air, and little cold air escapes when the door is opened. But chest freezers take up more space than an upright, and their open design can make it difficult to locate items, which are generally stacked one upon another.

- Upright freezers take up less floor space and offer greater convenience in terms of food storage and retrieval. However, they are less efficient than chest models, as cold air escapes and warm air rushes in each time the door is opened, making the upright freezer work harder to maintain a constant temperature.

You can maximize the efficiency of your fridge and freezer by following these simple guidelines.

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