



ENERGY STAR® Top Tier Sidesteps Windows

BY KEN BRENDEN

The ENERGY STAR program for doors, windows and skylights is in the midst of a comprehensive and aggressive revamp, based on a September 30, 2009, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on *Improving the Energy Efficiency of Products and Buildings* between the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). At that time, EPA became the lead agency on the ENERGY STAR program while DOE offers technical support and administers the National Building Rating program.

Following up on the MOU, DOE/EPA issued the *Enhanced Program Plan for ENERGY STAR Products* on December 2, 2009. Under the plan, ENERGY STAR becomes a two-tiered program, encompassing the existing scope of ENERGY STAR aimed at a 25 percent or less market share, and a top-tier—tentatively known as “ENERGY SuperStar”—that covers approximately five percent of the top-performing products in a given category. Decisions about the exact make-up of the top-tier program were scheduled to be made in December, in preparation for a January 2011 introduction.

In partial reaction to accusations of fraudulent labeling, DOE/EPA has decreed that all ENERGY STAR products will be required to be tested in an EPA/DOE accredited laboratory before the product can be qualified as ENERGY STAR—as many fenestration products already are required to submit NFRC ratings.

Initially, the top-tier program will include the six following product categories: clothes washers, dishwashers, refrigerators, TVs, air

conditioning units and heating equipment. Products whose performance can be affected by climate or installation, including windows, will not be offered with this initial product group.

For the time being, Phase Two for fenestration products will consist of further tightening of fenestration criteria, which will be accomplished by the usual focus on lower U-factors in most or all climate zones and adjusting SHGC in some climate zones.

What? No Windows?

Of some surprise to our industry, a top-tier program for fenestration products is not currently in the works, although it may be considered in the future. “EPA’s focus now is on the next specification revision for windows, doors and skylights,” EPA representative Doug Anderson told DWM magazine in October (*see related story in November-December DWM, page 18*). “[In the meantime], manufacturers who wish to participate in a high-performance window program ... should consider DOE’s R-5 Volume Windows Program.”

So, for the time being, “Phase Two” for fenestration products will consist of further tightening of fenestration criteria. This will be accomplished by the usual focus on lower U-factors in most or all climate zones and by adjusting SHGC in some climate zones, as well as by expanding education on shading and orientation.

Minimum air leakage requirements and mandating some form of structural testing may be added as well.

The process of developing the new criteria is now underway with initial analysis and research. This has included consumer research to better understand the market for energy-efficient products. The research has reflected that the target consumer represents a small subset of the U.S. population and already has an awareness of environmental problems. This target consumer is most likely in the range of 35-64 years in age, and most of these are homeowners.

Consumer research also revealed that the web is an extremely important tool in researching large purchases, and, because of this, it is vital to have information online that is both in-depth as well as updated frequently.

DOE Timeline

Following the research and analysis stage, the criteria upgrade project includes the following milestone dates:

- July 2011 – Preliminary criteria published;
- August 2011 – April 2012: Rounds of comment periods and final criteria development;
- May 2012 – Publish new program requirements; and
- March 2013 – Criteria takes effect. ■

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