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Wednesday, October 26, 2011

## Bethesda company explores the hidden cost of appliances

*Energy costs of coffee makers, toasters investigated*

by Peggy McEwan, Staff Writer

When John Jabara of Bethesda wanted to buy a coffee maker two years ago he wanted some facts other than how many cups it made and the purchase price. He wanted to know how much energy it used, the longterm cost of owning a particular coffee maker to him and to the environment.

Since the information was not available on the box or in the store, Jabara started a company, Savenia Labs, to determine the energy cost of operating common household appliances.

"This is the true cost of appliances," Jabara said. "The energy use and environmental impact."

When it comes to the environmental impact, Jabara is adamant.

"The small differences in energy uses can take a power plant off line," he said.

Jabara's vision for the use of the Savenia Lab information goes like this:

A person uses the Energy Ratings to purchase an energy efficient toaster oven. Over the life of the product, five to six years, he or she saves \$100. Adding an energy efficient coffee pot saves \$65 over the same amount of time and, hopefully, the consumer will eventually furnish his or her whole home with energy efficient appliances saving money and energy.

The energy efficient toaster oven alone, he said, reduces the carbon footprint by 1,200 pounds of carbon dioxide over six years. A house full of energy efficient appliances would reduce the environmental impact by 20,000 pounds of carbon dioxide over the same period.

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"That's about 154 tanker trucks filled to the brim with air pollution that will never get into the environment," Jabara said in an email.

Savenia Labs has rated coffee makers, toaster ovens and microwaves.

"We have tested over 200 appliances. We cover categories Energy Star, an Environmental Protection Agency guideline, doesn't cover. They do not cover small appliances," Jabara said.

Energy Star, following recommendations from the EPA, is a manufacturer's self certification program. They say they meet the standards and put the Energy Star seal on, Jabara said.

With Savenia labels, in addition to giving consumers information they can use to determine the true cost of their

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purchases, Jabara said there is a far-reaching effect.

"What happens is when you put out an energy rating system, the manufacturers put out a better energy-saving product," he said.

Jabara started Savenia Labs with five employees in 2009. It is headquartered at Bethesda Green, a business incubator and education nonprofit that promotes sustainable living practices.

He tests appliances at the University Maryland Center for Advanced LifeCycle Engineering (CALCE) in College Park.

"It's really clear that [Jabara] is filling a gap that hasn't been filled. From that point of view I think it is a very valuable thing he is doing," said Michael Azarian, research scientist at CALCE. "When you look at the cost of ownership, you don't just pay for it, it is also the cost of operating [the appliance] over its lifetime."

You can look at three coffee makers with the same features and the cost of operating them might be different. Savenia will tell you the cost to operate them, Azarian said.

"We started working on coffee makers, toaster ovens and microwaves," Jabara said. "Anything with a plug we could do."

Jabara and his colleagues put products through a 10-step testing process. It starts with a market research company asking thousands of consumers via Internet surveys how they use appliances.

"[We ask] how many minutes an appliance is used, what functions are used and for how many years and then we take that information into the lab to test the energy consumption of a typical user," Jabara said in an email. "We then go even further to look at the other environmental aspects of the product — like how far it travels to get to the store and whether the manufacturer has a recycling program or uses recycled content in the packaging."

He said they also test the products to make sure they do what they are supposed to — like make toast or coffee.

The result goes on the labels in the store with more details available on the Savenia Labs website, [www.savenialabs.com](http://www.savenialabs.com).

Since Savenia Labs is an independent lab, they buy the appliances to be tested and do not accept donations from manufacturers.

The lab is also independently funded, but Jabara declined to say how much he has invested. Jabara said he hopes to become profitable by selling the ratings to retailers, allowing them to use Savenia Labs labels in their stores.

"It will be a couple hundred dollars per store per month," he said.

Through the end of October, Savenia has a display of energy rated products in Strosnidars Hardware Stores in Bethesda and Silver Spring.

"We have found that people are interested in green, environmental things," said Lee Roeder, housewares buyer at Strosnidars Bethesda store. "This whole display has drawn a lot of interest."

Kathy Stansbury of Rockville and her son Taylor, 11, stopped to look at the Savenia Labs display in Bethesda.

"It's wonderful that they have this kind of rating. It does make a difference in what you choose," Stansbury said.

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