Green Electronics Daily

ENVIRONMENTAL BUSINESS, POLICY & TECHNOLOGY NEWS

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Today's News:

ENERGY STAR 'EXPANSION' under discussion in EPA would dilute program, confuse consumers, ITI says. CEA not consulted. (P. 1)

DON'T COPY CALIFORNIA on TV energy limits, retailers urge other states, federal government. (P. 2)

DISPLAYS: American Industrial Systems says its new LED-backlit LCD monitors offer low power use and high durability. (P. 3)

ENERGY EFFICIENCY: Amazon extends battery life 85 percent in new Kindle reader through firmware update. (P. 3)

GREEN NOTES: IDC to release ICT Sustainability Index Dec. 10 in Copenhagen. (P. 4)

INDUSTRY NOTES: Gridwise Alliance and International Engineering Consortium to work together on smart-grid technology. (P. 4)

Beyond Consumption in Use

High-Tech Raises Concerns Over EPA Moves to Expand Energy Star

The EPA has told some in high tech that it's holding internal discussions on the possibility of expanding Energy Star to take account of the "embedded energy" of products, industry officials said. The activity has some in business worried about the Energy Star program's being diluted and made more complex for consumers. EPA officials didn't reply to our request for comment.

"Embedded energy" is a term used to describe the energy consumed in making a product. The EPA let the Information Technology Industry Council know that it's considering including embedded energy as a yardstick in Energy Star, so the program can look at the carbon footprint of a qualifying product, said Rick Goss, the council's vice president of environment and sustainability. That's a shift from a focus on energy consumed by a product during its useful life, he told us.

The council raised the issue at a recent hearing of the House Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization and Procurement. Goss said the agency is considering taking into account a product's manufacturing operations, supply chain management, recycled or recovered product content and packaging among other qualifications for Energy Star. "The process of quantifying and measuring these impacts would be highly complex, and would prove confusing for businesses and consumers," he told the committee. "This proposal would result in a wide range of new and unclear factors and detract from the traditional focus of the Energy Star program on the energy consumption of products."

The Energy Star brand is widely recognized by institutional purchasers and the public in the U.S., Goss said. "Our concern here is that the program may be diluted and may become confusing to consumers if you start to add in criteria other than energy use of the product during its useful life," he told us. The EPA should keep the emphasis of Energy Star solely on the energy use of products, he said.

The CEA has done "little to no" consultation with the EPA on the proposed expansion of Energy Star, said Parker Brugge, the association's vice president of environmental affairs. "We are aware of it and we are

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hopeful to have those discussions but we have not been consulted up to now." The EPA has let individual companies know of the proposed expansion, he said. One area of concern about the proposed changes to Energy Star involve the agency's decision to incorporate energy use limits for products, said an industry executive. That move was reflected in the Energy Star version 5.0 spec for TVs that was recently completed, the source said. The spec says no TV, regardless of size, may use more power than a 50-inch set, he said. "That's a fundamental shift in the nature of the program away from efficiency and toward a program that judges a product uses too much power," the executive said. — ***Dinesh Kumar***

Independents Widen Appeal

Don't Copy California TV-Energy Rules, Dealers Urge Feds

Independent AV retailers in California are appealing to legislators in other states and to the federal government to avoid adopting the TV energy-use limits adopted in California last week (GED Nov 20 p1). The pleas came as CE industry groups told us they were contemplating a similar appeal.

"This is not a debate over philosophy. We all support energy efficiency," Pam Crane of Ken Crane's Big Screen Headquarters in Los Angeles said in a statement from the Californians for Smart Energy Consumption Coalition. "This is a debate over process. The CEC's regulations are based on old data, math errors, and a total disregard for Energy Star or how the consumer electronics industry operates."

"In less than two years, the energy efficiency of Energy Star TVs has improved by 41 percent without regulations," said Leon Soo Hoo, owner of Paradyme Sound and Vision in Sacramento. "A better way exists. The CEC's unjustified regulations should not be replicated."

The CEC ignored the concerns of industry, associations and California small businesses "and pushed through harmful and unnecessary regulations that will cost California $47 million a year in lost tax revenues and destroy 4,000 jobs," said Shawn Worst, the owner of Evolution Home Theatre in San Diego. "Alternatives exist that would save as much or more energy than the CEC's regulations, without hurting the economy, destroying jobs or hurting small businesses." The coalition hopes to meet with California's representatives in Congress, he said. "We would be happy to meet with Senator Feinstein's office, or any other elected official, to discuss our concerns and industry-supported alternatives."

Appeals to state and federal authorities are possible from other CE stakeholders, our canvass of industry groups found Monday. "CEDIA will continue to invest time and resources in this issue, not only in the state of California, but as the issue is brought up in other states," Darren Reaman, the director of public policy of the Custom Electronic Design & Installation Association, told us. "In addition, we will continue to work with industry stakeholders and communicate with government officials our concerns with proposed legislation or regulations on this important issue, and discuss industry-supported alternatives — many of which are already working in the marketplace."

Other industry groups and retailers are still considering the CEC's actions, they told us Monday. "The Plasma Display Coalition is still consulting with our members and the CEA regarding most appropriate next steps," said Jim Palumbo, the coalition's president. "There's a lot to digest in the statements made by the CEC and the actual written regulations." A Best Buy spokesman said, "We have nothing to say at this point but we will definitely reach out to you if that changes." Representatives of CEA and the Consumer Electronics Retailers Coalition didn't comment in response to requests. — ***Stephen A. Booth***

Green Electronics Daily won't be published Thursday, Nov. 26, because of the federal Thanksgiving holiday. Our next issue will be Friday, Nov. 27.

Displays

American Industrial Systems (AIS), a maker of industrial monitors and displays, said its new LED-backlit LCD monitors offer low power use along with high durability. "As the industrial market place moves toward power efficiency and green manufacturing, LED backlights have become the standard in energy efficient displays," the company said. LED backlights have generally been limited to small displays, but AIS said it has introduced 17-, 19- and 21.5-inch LED backlit LCDs.

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Italy's Sim2 Multimedia will introduce its first LED-based front projector at a London briefing next week. The Mico 50, which Sim2 calls "The Truly Green Projector," is a single-chip DLP model. In a September announcement at CEDIA, Sim2 said the set will use the T120 RGB-LED chipset from Luminus for its lamp and provide 1080p resolution with 800 lumens brightness (CED Sept 14 p1). The MSRP will be about $25,000, Sim2 said.

Energy Efficiency

Amazon said it will extend battery life 85 percent in its new Kindle reader through a firmware update. With the upgrade, the $259 model with a 6-inch screen will run seven days between charges even with its wireless feature turned on, the company said Tuesday. That compares with four days when the reader shipped. Battery life with wireless turned off remains at the previous level of two weeks maximum. "Battery power management for portable wireless devices is a complex technical area, and the battery life improvement announced today is the result of a six month firmware improvement and testing program," Amazon said. It also added a built-in native PDF reader so customers can read documents in the format without conversion. Kindles already sold will receive the battery improvements and native PDF support through an automatic firmware update delivered wirelessly.

Green Notes

Market research firm IDC said it has completed scoring an ICT Sustainability Index that measures a country's ability to use information and communications technologies (ICT) to reduce carbon emissions. The report will be released in Copenhagen Dec. 10 to coincide with the global climate-change talks. IDC said the index, ranking the G-20 countries, will help them "prioritize ICT investments in major sectors, such as manufacturing, transport and housing as part of their overall climate change strategy."

Industry Notes

The Gridwise Alliance and the International Engineering Consortium said they'll work together on smart-grid technology. The consortium will hold a Grid ComForum at Santa Clara, Calif., Feb. 2 and 3, and the alliance will lead a panel on smart-grid policy and regulation, the groups said.

International

Philips will ship two LCD TVs with its new LED Pro backlighting next month in the U.K. The LED Pro technology, announced at Berlin's IFA Fair in September, provides high brightness and contrast while consuming up to 50 percent less power than the cold-cathode fluorescent backlights used in conventional LCDs, Philips said. The technology uses an array of LEDs to light the screen from behind. The LEDs are split into segments. Each can be brightened, dimmed or turned off independently, depending on a scene's requirements. Philips increased the number of LED segments to 224 — 75 percent more than the previous generation of the technology. Each segment now lights a smaller section of the screen, allowing the backlight to match the screen content more accurately, Philips said. Other power-saving improvements in the new TVs include the use of a panel with dual-brightness enhancement film to recycle light "lost"in the set. The power-saving technologies earned the sets an "eco-label" certification, Philips said. It will offer 40- and 46-inch models at about $3,000 and $4,150.

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