Seeing There without Being There:  
Results of Using the Internet to Assess Appliance Availability in Retail Stores

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ABSTRACT

Assessing the availability of energy-efficient appliances in retail stores is an important component of the evaluation of appliance programs. However, conducting stocking inventories at a large number of retail stores can present a time-consuming and expensive proposition. This paper discusses the results of an approach to assessing retail availability that uses the Internet as a cost-effective alternative for collecting data on a large number of models at stores located in different regions. This analysis should serve as an indicator of the model availability encountered by consumers who visit selected retail stores.

This study assessed the availability of ENERGY STAR and Consortium for Energy Efficiency (CEE) Tier 1, 2, and 3 clothes washers, dishwashers, refrigerators, and room air conditioners during the spring of 2006 at Best Buy and Sears stores located in and near Cambridge, Massachusetts, compared with the availability in and near Sacramento, California, Tampa, Florida, and Rochester, New York. Greater availability of CEE Tier 2 and Tier 3 models in Massachusetts than in other locations would be consistent with the stores’ expectations of higher sales of those models. This was in fact the case with clothes washers, suggesting that the Massachusetts ENERGY STAR Appliance program, which began providing $100 incentives in 2006 to customers who purchase Tier 3 models, has been successful in encouraging stores to stock the most energy-efficient clothes washer models. However, the stocking levels of high-efficiency dishwashers, refrigerators, and room air conditioners is similar at the Massachusetts stores compared to the stores located elsewhere.

This type of Internet analysis should provide valuable insight in understanding appliance markets and planning programs.