

Trump administration pulls plug on energy-efficient bulb rules



Washington, September 5 (RHC)-- Donald Trump's administration has issued a new rule reversing a requirement for all new light bulbs to be energy-efficient by 2020, a move welcomed by industry but strongly criticized by climate change groups.

The rollback represents the latest in the U.S. president's running battle since taking office against nearly all forms of environmental regulation, coming shortly after his administration axed rules limiting leaks of the greenhouse gas methane and after weakening a key wildlife protection law.

Incandescent light bulbs, which were invented by Thomas Edison in 1878 and lose 90 percent of their energy to heat, have been on the decline since a 2007 law that mandated phased-in energy efficiency targets they could not meet.

LED bulbs, which use 20 to 25 percent of the energy of their traditional pear-shaped counterparts and last 10-25 times longer, now have the bulk of the market share.

Although they cost slightly more (\$2.50 compared to \$1.50 in a multipack) they make up for this in saved energy costs of \$50 to \$150 over their lifetime. Halogen bulbs, a slightly more efficient version of traditional incandescents, represent about a quarter of the market according to the Association of Electrical Equipment and Medical Imaging Manufacturers (NEMA).

On former president Barack Obama's final day in office, his administration updated definitions under the 2007 law to include items like track lighting, candle-shaped bulbs used in chandeliers, and round globe bulbs used in bathrooms, with this final phase out set to occur by January 1, 2020.

The Trump administration has now deleted this update, arguing it was not in line with Congress's original legislative intent and would place an extra cost burden on consumers and businesses.

"This action will ensure that the choice of how to light homes and businesses is left to the American people, not the federal government," the Department of Energy said in a statement welcomed by NEMA, which agreed that the Obama administration had misconstrued the statute.

But the announcement was slammed by environmental groups including the Natural Resources Defense Council, which called the move illegal because it violated "anti-backsliding" provisions that prevent the energy department from weakening standards.

Noah Horowitz, the non-profit's director for its center for energy efficiency standards, said in a statement it would "lead to higher energy bills for homes and businesses, plus significantly more pollution harming our health and the environment due to all the extra electricity that will need to be generated."

He added the government was moving forward with its plans "despite the fact that almost 64,000 comments were registered against the rollback," including 37 electric utilities serving 55 million people. "The only support came from a few people who oppose regulations in general, five lighting companies, and their trade association," he continued.

"Do you suppose that's because they make more money on incandescent bulbs that burn out every year or two than from the longer-lasting, energy efficient bulbs that would have been required as of January 1?"

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