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March 26, 2010

Ms. Kathleen Vokes
US Environmental Protection Agency
ENERGY STAR for Set-top Boxes
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Re: ENERGY STAR® Program Requirements for Set-top Boxes

Dear Ms. Vokes:

On behalf of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association (“NCTA”),¹ I am responding to the request by the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) for comments from industry stakeholders on the ENERGY STAR® Program Requirements for Set-top Boxes.

NCTA and its members have supported and continue to support the voluntary ENERGY STAR federal program designed to promote the manufacture and use of more energy-efficient set-top boxes. We welcome this opportunity to submit comments and recommendations on the latest versions of the ENERGY STAR® Program Requirements documents to the EPA in an effort to assist in the ongoing development of the program.²

Labeling

The Partner Commitment section of the draft specification requires that, for all qualified set-tops, the *manufacturing* partner clearly display the ENERGY STAR label on product packaging and in product literature.³ We respectfully request that the EPA clarify that this particular commitment be made optional for manufacturer partners.

¹ NCTA is the principal trade association for the U.S. cable television industry, representing cable operators serving more than 90 percent of the nation's cable television households, more than 200 cable program networks, and suppliers of equipment (including set-top boxes) and services to the cable industry.

² ENERGY STAR® Program Requirements for Set-top Boxes, Draft 1, Version 3.0.

³ See Partner Commitment language, page 2, lines 22-24.

By making this commitment optional, we seek to avoid the confusion that could result if the literature is inadvertently passed along to an end-user customer of a service provider which itself is not an ENERGY STAR partner.

In addition to the above concern, there is also a requirement for electronic notification requiring that “the ENERGY STAR mark must appear on average at least once per day for a duration of not less than five seconds.” We do not believe it is EPA’s intent to require a device that, for example, has been turned off for an extended period of time i.e., longer than one day) by the customer, to be required to display the ENERGY STAR mark for longer than five seconds in order to adhere to a once per day average when restarted. We seek clarification from EPA on what “...on average at least once per day...” means in this context.

Total Energy Consumption

At the March 19, 2010 ENERGY STAR® for Set-top Boxes Stakeholders meeting, there was some discussion regarding the validity of the Total Energy Consumption (“TEC”) method proposed by EPA in the draft specification. NCTA strongly supports the TEC method and believes it will provide set-top box manufacturers and service providers the flexibility they need to determine the best approach to designing energy efficient products and services while also retaining a comparable metric in which performance can be assessed under the auspices of the ENERGY STAR® program.

Multi-room Set-top

Section 1 of the draft specification defines a Multi-room set-top as follows:

Multi-room STB: A Cable, Satellite, IP or Terrestrial STB that is capable of distributing simultaneous, independent streams of video content to multiple displays or thin-client/remote STBs within a single family dwelling. For the purposes of this specification, a connected display must have a resolution of no less than 480i. Products that provide gateway services in multi-subscriber scenarios are not considered multi-room STBs under this specification.

As discussed at the March 19, 2010 ENERGY STAR® for Set-top Boxes Stakeholders meeting, we respectfully request that the EPA clarify that a multi-room set-top is not limited to distributing video content to only thin-client/remote set-tops but may distribute content to other set-top devices as well. Furthermore, we do not understand why a connected display must have a resolution of “...no less than 480i” and seek clarification of that requirement.

Thin-Client/Remote

Section 3, Table 1 of the draft specification addresses the base functionality annual energy allowance for various categories of set-top boxes.⁴ The THIN-CLIENT/REMOTE

⁴ See Table 1: Base Functionality Annual Energy Allowance, page 10, line 352.

category is currently allowed an annual energy allowance of 22 kWhr/year. We believe this allowance is too low. Given that this category of set-top box will be used to receive services distributed over a home network, we respectfully request that the EPA raise the allowance from 22 kWhr/year to 32 kWhr/year in order to accommodate the energy contribution of home network interfaces, such as MoCA and WiFi, which are expected to be deployed in this device category.

Additional Tuners Allowance

Section 3, Table 2 of the draft specification contains language addressing the allowance for Additional Tuners.⁵ As currently defined, manufacturers can apply the allowance only once per model, regardless of the number of tuners installed. We believe this requirement unfairly penalizes manufacturers designing set-top boxes featuring more than two tuners. A set-top box featuring multiple tuners must be designed and built with additional hardware resources such as a larger central processor and power supply, as well as additional memory necessary to accommodate the additional tuners. Consequently, these devices will consume more power regardless of whether the additional tuners are in active use or not. Moreover, the annual energy allowance designated for Additional Tuners was lowered significantly from the allowance defined by the EPA only a short time ago under Version 2.0 of the ENERGY STAR[®] Program Requirements for Set-Top Boxes (from 53 kWhr/year to 16 kWhr/year). Therefore, we respectfully request that the EPA clarify that the Additional Tuners allowance may be applied to a set-top box on a per-tuner basis, so that manufacturers have the needed flexibility to design and build a multi-tuner set-top box capable of meeting the ENERGY STAR[®] requirements.

Elimination of Grandfathering

Section 6 of the draft specification contains language addressing product grandfathering under the draft specification.⁶ The draft specification currently states:

ENERGY STAR qualification under previous Versions is not automatically granted for the life of the product model.” Therefore, any product sold, marketed, or identified by the manufacturing partner as ENERGY STAR must meet the current specification in effect at the time of manufacture of the product.

As defined, it is not clear if a set-top box which qualified under ENERGY STAR[®] Tier 1 requirements, and that now has been purchased and deployed by a service provider, would retain its qualified status past the date in which the Tier 2 requirements go into effect. We respectfully request that the EPA clarify that a set-top box qualified under the ENERGY STAR[®] Tier 1 specification retains its Tier 1 qualified status for the life of the product, so long as it continues to meet the Tier 1 requirements. Furthermore, we seek clarification from EPA on whether a set-top box initially deployed by a service provider as a qualified Tier 1 product, but then subsequently upgraded, can qualify as a Tier 2 product so long as the set-top box meets Tier 2 requirements.

⁵ See Table 2: Additional Functionalities Annual Energy Allowance, page 11, line 384.

⁶ See Section 6, page 14, lines 502-506.

Test Configuration

Appendix A of the draft specification contains language addressing the applicability of the test procedures when measuring the power consumption of set-top boxes. The draft specification currently states that “[P]artners must test products in their “as-shipped” configuration.” We seek clarification from EPA on what “as-shipped” means in this context. For example, could a manufacturer who has built DOCSIS capability into a product model test that model utilizing the allowance for DOCSIS even though the model may be sold to a service provider that will not immediately use the DOCSIS capability?

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NCTA looks forward to working with the EPA and other stakeholders in developing the ENERGY STAR[®] Program Requirements for Set-top Boxes. We believe the comments and suggestions we have offered will help balance the goals and objectives for the program with an ever-increasing desire by cable customers for additional features and functions in set-top boxes, and establish reasonable criteria that will allow cable service providers and manufacturers to make improvements in product energy efficiency. Should you have any questions or seek additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Andy Scott
Vice President of Engineering

cc: Stephen Pantano, ICF International