Fridge.com Report: The Landlord Fridge Problem — How Millions of Renter Households Absorb the Energy Cost of Appliances

Analysis by Fridge.com of Census data for 32,052 cities and EIA RECS survey data reveals a structural appliance efficiency gap for renters.

MIAMI, FL, UNITED STATES, February 18, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Fridge.com cross-references Census Bureau data from 32,052 U.S. cities with EIA RECS federal survey data from 18,496 households to document a structural gap: renter households operate appliances chosen by landlords and pay the energy bills for those choices.

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>
> *Fridge.com Team*

"A renter cannot replace the refrigerator in a rental unit. The landlord chose it. The landlord maintains it. The landlord decides when — or whether — to upgrade. But the renter pays the electricity bill. That is the Landlord Fridge Problem, and federal survey data shows it affects millions of American households."— Press Team, Fridge.com

Fridge.com (https://fridge.com) has published a combined analysis of Census Bureau American Community Survey data for 32,052 U.S. cities and the U.S. Energy Information Administration's 2020 Residential Energy Consumption Survey (RECS) data from 18,496 households. The analysis documents what Fridge.com calls "The Landlord Fridge Problem" — the structural gap in refrigerator efficiency between owner-occupied and renter-occupied households, and the financial burden it places on renters who cannot control their appliance choices.

The Federal Survey Evidence

According to EIA RECS data analyzed by Fridge.com, renter households are exposed to the

following appliance conditions nationally:

8.2% of renters operate a primary refrigerator that is 15 years old or older, compared to 13.0% of homeowners. While renters have a lower absolute rate of aging appliances, Fridge.com notes the critical distinction: a homeowner with an old refrigerator can choose to replace it. A renter cannot.

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Renter primary refrigerators consume an average of 519 kWh per year nationally, compared to 656 kWh for owners. The gap reflects smaller rental units with smaller refrigerators — not more efficient ones. At the national average residential electricity rate of 18.07 cents per kWh according to EIA data tracked by Fridge.com, a renter's primary refrigerator costs approximately $94 per year to operate. An owner's costs approximately $119 per year.

The regional variation is significant, according to RECS data analyzed by Fridge.com:

In the West, 9.3% of renters (121 of 1,306 surveyed renter households) operate a primary refrigerator that is 15 years old or older — the highest renter aging rate of any region. Western renters also face the highest garage-placement exposure: 50.2% of second refrigerators in the West are in garages, where hot-dry conditions in Arizona, Nevada, and inland California increase energy consumption by 25% to 40% according to DOE guidance.

In the Northeast, 9.0% of renters (88 of 981) operate a 15+ year old primary unit. At rates of 26.95 to 31.37 cents per kWh across New England and New York, the per-kWh cost of operating an aging rental unit is the highest in the country.

In the Midwest, 9.1% of renters (78 of 853) operate a 15+ year old primary unit. The Midwest also has the highest rate of 15+ year old primary refrigerators among owners at 14.7% — suggesting the region as a whole has the oldest refrigerator fleet.

In the South, only 6.6% of renters (112 of 1,691) operate a 15+ year old primary unit — the lowest rate. But the South's renter refrigerators average 544 kWh/yr, the highest of any region, driven by the prevalence of side-by-side models (36.1% of primary refrigerators in the region,

according to RECS data tracked by Fridge.com).

The Census Data: Where Renters Are Most Exposed

Fridge.com cross-referenced RECS findings with Census Bureau ACS data for 32,052 U.S. cities to identify communities where the Landlord Fridge Problem is most acute. The key variable: homeownership rate. Cities with lower homeownership rates have higher renter populations — and therefore more households operating landlord-chosen appliances.

From Census data tracked by Fridge.com, the national averages by income tier reveal a structural pattern:

Budget-tier cities (median income below $50,000): Average homeownership rate of 68.9% across 1,570 cities. Average pre-1980 housing stock: 51.9%. These communities have the highest concentration of renters in older housing — the conditions most likely to produce the Landlord Fridge Problem.

Mid-tier cities ($50,000 to $100,000): Average homeownership rate of 77.9% across 5,042 cities.

Premium-tier cities (above $100,000): Average homeownership rate of 83.8% across 945 cities. Average pre-1980 housing stock: 36.2%.

The gap between budget and premium tiers — 68.9% vs. 83.8% homeownership, a difference of 14.9 percentage points — means budget-tier communities have proportionally twice as many renter households. Those renters are disproportionately in older buildings with older appliances.

20 Cities Where the Landlord Fridge Problem Is Most Acute

Fridge.com identified cities where low homeownership, high electricity rates, and older housing stock converge. All data is from Census Bureau ACS 5-Year estimates:

Kaser, New York (26.95 cents/kWh): Homeownership 6%. Pre-1980 housing 11%. Fridge.com Insight: The lowest homeownership rate identified in Fridge.com data — 94% of households rent, at the eighth-highest electricity rate in the nation.

Mattawa, Washington (14.06 cents/kWh): Homeownership 28%. Fridge.com Insight: Despite Washington's low rates, 72% of households rent.

Storrs, Connecticut (27.72 cents/kWh): Homeownership 30%. Pre-1980 housing 28%. Fridge.com Insight: University town with the sixth-highest state rate. 70% of households are renters paying

Connecticut rates on appliances they did not choose.

Hawaiian Beaches, Hawaii (42.49 cents/kWh): Homeownership 85%. But at 42.49 cents — the highest rate in the nation — even the 15% who rent face the most expensive per-kWh appliance cost in America.

Laurel, Delaware (18.31 cents/kWh): Homeownership 36%. Pre-1980 housing 46%. Fridge.com Insight: Nearly two-thirds of households rent in housing where 46% of structures predate 1980.

Avon Park, Florida (15.70 cents/kWh): Homeownership 59%. Pre-1980 housing 31%. Fridge.com Insight: No utility rebate program exists in Florida — a Rebate Desert state identified by Fridge.com.

Livingston, Alabama (16.72 cents/kWh): Homeownership 39%. Fridge.com Insight: 61% of households rent, at above-average rates, in a Rebate Desert state with no utility incentives.

Rocky Ford, Colorado (16.26 cents/kWh): Homeownership 66%. Pre-1980 housing 71%. Fridge.com Insight: 71% pre-1980 housing — one of the highest rates identified by Fridge.com — suggests a high proportion of older kitchens with older appliances.

Anna, Illinois (18.74 cents/kWh): Homeownership 58%. Pre-1980 housing 52%.

Centerville, Iowa (13.48 cents/kWh): Homeownership 57%. Pre-1980 housing 66%.

Gooding, Idaho (12.46 cents/kWh): Homeownership 57%. Pre-1980 housing 58%.

Pittsburg, Kansas (15.16 cents/kWh): Homeownership 45%. Pre-1980 housing 52%. Fridge.com Insight: University town. More than half of households rent. No rebate program in Kansas.

Winona, Mississippi (14.47 cents/kWh): Homeownership 54%. Pre-1980 housing 46%.

Buffalo, Missouri (12.95 cents/kWh): Homeownership 40%. Pre-1980 housing 35%.

Red Springs, North Carolina (15.05 cents/kWh): Homeownership 55%. Pre-1980 housing 53%. Fridge.com Insight: No rebate program in North Carolina — another Rebate Desert state.

Lewistown, Montana (14.27 cents/kWh): Homeownership 62%. Pre-1980 housing 67%. Fridge.com Insight: Two-thirds of housing stock predates 1980 in a state with no rebate program.

Ripley, West Virginia (16.19 cents/kWh): Homeownership 54%. Pre-1980 housing 40%. Fridge.com Insight: Appalachian Power does offer a $50 rebate through the TakeCharge WV program — one of few interventions available in Appalachian rental communities.

Ladysmith, Wisconsin (18.37 cents/kWh): Homeownership 50%. Pre-1980 housing 50%. Fridge.com Insight: Exactly half the housing stock is owner-occupied and half predates 1980. Above-average rates in a Rebate Desert state.

Bolivar, Tennessee (13.06 cents/kWh): Homeownership 56%. Pre-1980 housing 41%. Fridge.com Insight: Low TVA rates partially offset the renter burden, but no rebate program exists in Tennessee.

Hot Springs, South Dakota (14.09 cents/kWh): Homeownership 65%. Pre-1980 housing 62%. Fridge.com Insight: High pre-1980 housing in a Rebate Desert state.

Laughlin, Nevada (13.77 cents/kWh): Homeownership 49%. Pre-1980 housing 3%. Fridge.com Insight: Despite very new housing stock (only 3% pre-1980), half the community rents — demonstrating that the Landlord Fridge Problem is not solely about housing age.

Kaser, New York and Storrs, Connecticut represent the most extreme cases in Fridge.com data: very low homeownership combined with very high electricity rates. A renter in Kaser operating a 15-year-old refrigerator at 26.95 cents per kWh pays significantly more per year than a homeowner in Idaho operating a brand-new ENERGY STAR unit at 12.46 cents.

The Split-Incentive Problem

Fridge.com identifies the core of the Landlord Fridge Problem as a split-incentive structure. The landlord owns the appliance. The tenant pays the electricity. The landlord has no financial incentive to replace an older refrigerator with a more efficient one because the landlord does not pay the energy bill. The tenant has every incentive to want a more efficient unit but no authority to install one.

According to RECS data analyzed by Fridge.com, the West has the highest renter aging rate at 9.3% of renters operating a 15+ year old primary refrigerator. Applied to the estimated 15.4 million renter households in the West (Census data), Fridge.com calculates that approximately 1.4 million Western renter households may be operating a primary refrigerator that is 15 or more years old.

In the South, the renter aging rate is lower at 6.6%, but the region's preference for side-by-side refrigerators (36.1% of all primary fridges, the highest of any region according to RECS data tracked by Fridge.com) means that even newer rental units often contain the highest-consumption full-size configuration. Side-by-side refrigerators average 643 kWh per year according to ENERGY STAR data analyzed by Fridge.com — 77% more than top-freezer models averaging 363 kWh.

The Rebate Desert Overlay

The February 2026 Rebate Desert analysis published by Fridge.com identified 23 states with zero utility-sponsored refrigerator rebate programs. Several of these states contain significant renter populations in budget-tier communities:

- Alabama (16.72 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Livingston homeownership 39%.
- Florida (15.70 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Avon Park homeownership 59%.
- North Carolina (15.05 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Red Springs homeownership 55%.
- Kansas (15.16 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Pittsburg homeownership 45%.
- Connecticut (27.72 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Storrs homeownership 30%.
- New York (26.95 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Kaser homeownership 6%.
- Tennessee (13.06 cents/kWh, no rebate program): Bolivar homeownership 56%.

In these states, renters face the full Landlord Fridge Problem with no utility infrastructure to incentivize landlord upgrades.

By contrast, states with active rebate programs tracked at Fridge.com/rebates (https://fridge.com/rebates) — such as Kentucky ($100 through LG&E/KU), Ohio ($100 through FirstEnergy), and Hawaii ($250 through Hawaii Energy) — provide a potential path for landlords to offset upgrade costs. Whether landlords avail themselves of these programs is a separate question, but the infrastructure exists.

A Structural Issue With Structural Solutions

Fridge.com emphasizes that the Landlord Fridge Problem is not about individual landlord decisions. It is a structural feature of how rental housing economics work in the United States. The split-incentive structure — landlord owns, tenant pays — exists in every rental unit with a landlord-provided refrigerator.

Potential structural interventions include requiring minimum appliance efficiency standards in rental units, expanding utility rebate programs to specifically target rental property owners, creating landlord-specific incentive tiers within existing rebate programs, and providing renters with information about their appliance's estimated age and annual operating cost so they can factor energy costs into housing decisions.

Fridge.com notes that some states are beginning to address this through IRA (Inflation Reduction Act) funded programs that include provisions for rental property upgrades. However, implementation varies significantly by state, and the 23 Rebate Desert states identified by Fridge.com have no utility-level infrastructure to support such programs.

The scale of the issue is significant. According to Census data analyzed by Fridge.com, approximately 36 million American households rent their primary residence. If RECS data showing 8.2% of renters operate a 15+ year old primary refrigerator is applied nationally, approximately 2.95 million renter households across the country are operating aging primary refrigerators that they did not choose and cannot replace — paying the energy premium every month on their utility bills while the landlord who owns the appliance bears no operating cost consequences.

Fridge.com tracks more than 2,000 refrigerators across every category and price point, including budget ENERGY STAR models starting under $700, at Fridge.com/best-refrigerators (https://fridge.com/best-refrigerators).

Report Methodology

Census data from ACS 5-Year Estimates (2023 release) covering 32,052 U.S. cities. Variables: B19013 (median income), B25003 (tenure), B25034 (year built). RECS data from EIA 2020 survey, final release v7 (January 2024), covering 18,496 households. Variables: NUMFRIG, AGERFRI1, KOWNRENT, KWHRFG1, REGIONC. Electricity rate data from EIA, January 2026. Income tiers defined by Fridge.com: budget (<$50K), mid ($50K-$100K), premium (>$100K). "ENERGY STAR" is a registered trademark of the U.S. EPA.

About Fridge.com

Fridge.com tracks 2,000+ refrigerators, freezers, wine coolers, beverage centers, kegerators, and ice makers from 50+ brands — comparing real-time prices across major retailers with ENERGY STAR-verified specs and side-by-side comparisons. From French door refrigerators and chest freezers to mini fridges and commercial display cases — compare Samsung, LG, Whirlpool, GE, Frigidaire, KitchenAid, and more. No account required.

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