

Behaviour Change: A Series of Practical Guides
for Policy-Makers and Practitioners

Number 2

Targeting Specific Lifestyle Groups

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Defra has commissioned and funded this study, but the views expressed in this guide do not necessarily reflect Defra policy.

1. Introduction to the series

Defra's 5 year strategy (*Delivering the Essentials of Life*¹) coupled with the UK Government sustainable development strategy (*Securing the Future*²) set out an ambitious agenda for environmental leadership and sustainable development. Embedding these core principles relies on influencing change and making it easier for producers and consumers to behave more sustainably. This is a sizeable task, since changing behaviours is a complex matter and innovative solutions are required.

In July 2005, Defra initiated a programme of research that aimed to broaden understanding of how Government (and others) can most effectively promote pro-environmental behaviour amongst producers and consumers. Several studies were commissioned as part of this research programme, each with a remit to explore a unique aspect of pro-environmental behaviour change.

This practical guide forms part of a series of papers that aims to summarise the key findings and policy implications from these studies.

A full list of titles in this series is provided below:

- Number 1: Sustainable Resource Use in the Home
- Number 2: Targeting Specific Lifestyle Groups
- Number 3: Sustainable Development as a "Collective Choice" Problem
- Number 4: Triggering Widespread Adoption of Sustainable Practices
- Number 5: Understanding Choice
- Number 6: Sustainable Shopping and Sustainable Production
- Number 7: Enhancing Sustainability at Farm Level
- Number 8: Tackling the Waste Challenge
- Number 9: Encouraging Sustainability Amongst Small Businesses
- Number 10: Sustainable Resource Use in Business and Organisations

¹ Defra (2004) *Delivering the essentials of life: Defra's five year strategy*, London: HMSO.
See <http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/5year-strategy/index.htm>.

² Defra (2005) *Securing the Future: UK Government Sustainable Development Strategy*, London: HMSO.
See <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm>.

2. Project summary

This Practical Guide represents the summary results and implications for policy of a short research project commissioned by Defra. The study forms part of a continuing programme of research into environmental behaviour at the University of Exeter. The research sought to examine how behaviours for sustainability were practiced in everyday life and how such practices varied according to lifestyle groups. On the basis of these findings, a series of policy implications have been developed and included in this guide.

The research sought to examine behaviour-change in terms of three key issues:

- linking environmental practice to everyday practice – establishing the link between everyday lived experiences and action for the environment;
- knowing who to target – through segmentation, providing a basis for targeting policy to specific lifestyle groups; and
- establishing the potential for change – for each type of activity and lifestyle segment, examining the barriers and motivations for action.

The research employed a two-stage methodology to both re-examine existing data and, on the basis of these analyses, to collect further data to refine the approach. The existing data were based on an ESRC-funded project from 2001-2003 (Barr *et al.*, 2003), with the collection of 1265 questionnaires in four different areas of Devon, focussing on environmental behaviours and attitudes relating to water saving, energy conservation, waste management and green consumption. New data were collected in the form of eight focus group discussions based on the quantitative findings.

The research examined the quantitative data by first examining how peoples' environmental behaviours were inter-related. Using these different behavioural categories, individuals were grouped together into distinctive segments according to their level of behavioural commitment. Finally, the properties of each segment were examined in terms of the variables that influenced different types of behaviour for each group. The focus groups were used to provide a means by which these results could be contextualised.

3. Key findings

The analysis was divided into two main stages:

- 1) a further statistical analysis of data collected during our previous research in Devon including the use of path analyses, discussed in an 80 page Technical Report (DEFRA, 2005)³; and
- 2) a qualitative investigation of the potential role of branding using eight focus groups held in January 2006, forming a Final Summary Report (DEFRA, 2006)⁴.

This Practical Guide provides practical rather than theoretical advice on policy development and implications.

3.1 Quantitative Survey and Analysis

There were three key findings from the re-analysis of the Devon data.

- 1) **Factor Analysis** of the data suggested that policy-makers should utilise a categorisation of environmental behaviour that is based on the type of activity, rather than by the sector of activity (e.g. water use). The three types of activity were:
 - **purchase decisions** focused around shopping habits;
 - **habitual behaviour** focused around behaviour in the house; and
 - **recycling behaviour** focused around waste management.
- 2) **Cluster Analysis** identified four groups of individuals who acted in four environmentally distinct ways.
 - **'Committed Environmentalists'** were distinguished by their high levels of green purchase behaviour and involvement in composting, alongside high levels of commitment of habitual and recycling activities. They tended to be in older age groups, on moderate incomes and were more likely to hold university degrees.
 - **'Mainstream Environmentalists'** were pro-environmental in a very similar manner to committed individuals, but with the key exception of composting where behavioural commitment was low. They were younger than committed individuals, on moderate incomes and were less likely to have higher education qualifications.
 - **'Occasional Environmentalists'** were less likely to purchase green products than the previous two groups, but they were relatively committed to both habitual actions and recycling around the home. They were younger than the more committed groups, with the highest income level of all the groups. Educationally, they were more likely to have a degree than mainstream environmentalists.
 - **'Non-Environmentalists'** were only pro-environmental in a very small number of cases. Low levels of green purchasing, habitual and recycling behaviour were reported. They were the youngest group in the sample, on very low incomes and with the lowest educational attainment.

³ See http://www.defra.gov.uk/science/project_data/DocumentLibrary/SD14005/SD14005_3523_TRP.doc

⁴ See http://www.defra.gov.uk/science/project_data/DocumentLibrary/SD14005/SD14005_3524_FRP.doc

- 3) **Path Analyses** using an analytical framework of environmental action revealed the key influencing variables for each of the four clusters above. In particular, these analyses revealed the complexity of the variables and the need to take a wide-ranging policy approach to influencing behaviour. Specifically, the variables influencing behaviour according to each cluster can be summarised as follows.
- **'Committed Environmentalists'**. The purchase behaviour of this group was strongly influenced by environmental concern and they were also much more likely to be willing to pay higher prices to purchase environmentally-friendly goods. In terms of their habitual actions, they were willing to sacrifice comfort to help the environment and felt a strong moral obligation to undertake small actions around the home to help the environment. In terms of recycling behaviour, although intentions were strongly influenced by beliefs that their behaviour would be effective and by environmental concern, the presence of kerbside recycling was the most dominant determinant.
 - **'Mainstream Environmentalists'**. The purchase behaviour for this group had a diverse range of influences, including environmental concerns, moral obligation and strong beliefs that local and organic food was better for the environment. However, the dominant factor governing positive behaviour was access to a garden. In terms of habitual activities, influences shifted to logistical concerns about undertaking small actions around the home, alongside a willingness to sacrifice comfort to help the environment, as well as moral obligation to help the environment. An important finding was also that those in older age groups were more likely to make small behavioural changes to help the environment. Finally, recycling behaviour in this group was dominated less by kerbside recycling facilities and more by the perception of convenience of recycling, moral obligations and environmental concerns.
 - **'Occasional Environmentalists'**. Similar to the mainstream environmentalists, this group were heavily influenced in their green purchase behaviour by access to a garden and beliefs that local and organic food was better for the environment. However, there was a much stronger influence of moral obligation in predicting habitual behaviour. Recycling activity in this group was influenced most strongly by logistical considerations regarding convenience of recycling facilities. Those in older age groups tended to recycle more. However, a range of situational factors were also significant, with females being more likely to recycle than males.
 - **'Non-Environmentalists'**. In contrast to the other three clusters, this group of individuals had a radically different set of influences on their behaviour, with those most likely to purchase sustainable products being those most aware of other's green purchasing behaviour and individuals who derived satisfaction from 'doing their bit'. Habitual activities were influenced by beliefs that individual behaviours would be effective. Recycling was influenced by factors such as trust in official information, environmental concern and being in an older age group.

3.2 Qualitative Focus Group Work

An analysis of data from the eight focus groups (two for each identified cluster) revealed a great deal of consensus with regards to the key barriers to behavioural change. Although attitudes and

3. Key findings

behaviours vary between the clusters, focus group participants consistently cited the following barriers to pro-environmental behaviour:

- cost;
- inconvenience;
- laziness;
- lack of facilities/infrastructure;
- lack of information; and
- lack of trust in national and international authorities.

Nevertheless, most groups were aware of the need to act in an environmentally friendly manner and wanted to do more. For the most part, there was also consensus that incentives were preferable to controls. It should be acknowledged, however, that behind the apparent harmony in responses, there was a gradation in attitudes across the spectrum from 'Committed' to 'Non-Environmentalists'.

More specific findings from the Focus Groups are outlined below.

- Very few respondents were keen to adopt a radically different lifestyle, but many were willing to make **incremental adjustments** to their lifestyle.
- There is clear evidence of an **'intention-behaviour' gap**, with individuals specifying many barriers to action, despite stating that they are willing to act.
- **Personal responsibility** needs to be tackled in relation to the ascribed roles attributed by individuals to citizens, the state and major companies. Crucially, there is a lack of response efficacy (the extent to which individuals believe their behaviour can have a tangible impact) amongst individuals who ascribe a greater responsibility to external agents. This can be framed at a range of scales and was expressed both in terms of a lack of national government commitment as well as at the international level.
- A great deal of discussion centred on the perceived **role of 'big business'** and in particular supermarkets and how modern lifestyles necessitate the use of such retailers that are perceived as being less sustainable. Shifting away from this way of living was seen as problematic because of time and cost factors.
- Behaviour change is most likely to occur at scales where **levels of collective action** can readily be engaged and measured, such as at the community level. The focus groups were all framed within discursive contexts where respondents used each others' behaviour as a measure of their own level of activity.
- The importance of cost should not be underestimated. The focus groups revealed that this was an extremely important determinant of behaviour – particularly amongst those in the non-environmentalist group. There was a clear signal that although further environmental surcharges or disincentives would be unpopular, **creating incentives** to act in a more environmentally responsible manner would be effective.

These important findings are corroborated by the results of quantitative analysis reported in detail in our Technical Report. The following sections outline the key implications of these findings for policy by introducing three important concepts that have emerged from our analysis.

4. Policy implications

4.1 Concepts

The research undertaken for this project is underpinned by three inter-related concepts that drive the following suite of policy implications.

1. **'Practices not problems'**: both previous academic research (see a review in Barr et al., 2005) and the current study have confirmed that behaviours are 'practiced' within the daily routines of everyday life. Individuals who engaged in pro-environmental behaviour build pro-environmental activity into their purchase decisions (when shopping), their habitual daily routines (such as 'mundane' or seemingly inconsequential behaviour around the home, like the use of energy and water) and their recycling behaviour (the use and disposal of post-consumer wastes). The implication of this key finding is that new campaigns, at whatever spatial scale, need to address behaviour from a 'practice' perspective, rather than a 'problem-focused' viewpoint. The implication of this shift is therefore a move away from environmental campaigns focused on 'energy' or 'water' towards messages that promote reflection and action on 'purchase decisions' and 'being sustainable in the home'.
2. **'Targeting lifestyles'**: the second key concept to emerge from our research is that there needs to be a shift towards segmentation as a means by which to understand the alternative barriers and motivations to action for specific lifestyle groups. Segmentation is commonplace in social marketing practice (NSMS, 2005) and seeks to address key barriers to change. Our research for this project has demonstrated that there are lifestyle groups that can be identified in relation to environmental practices and that the influences acting to predict behaviour are complex, dependent on the environmental practice in question. The key implication for policy, therefore, is that policy needs to be specifically nuanced in terms of both practices and lifestyles, which leads to our third key concept.
3. **'Social marketing'**: Previous research (McKenzie-Mohr, 2000) has highlighted the role of social marketing as a technique for generating change. The key principles in this approach are focused around identifying key barriers to change and working at the community level to effect change. This research explored the ways in which social marketing as a broader concept of normative engagement in behaviour could be used to effect change.

These three concepts will now be elaborated in relation to seven key implications for policy, driven by the findings from this research.

4.2 Policy implications

The following are presented as key implications for policy emanating from this research.

The significance of social acceptability

"I[t] feel[s] really dodgy saying you're an environmentalist, sort of like you're Swampy and his mates" (Non-environmentalist, Focus Group 8)

Implicit within the research findings was that very few individuals in the less committed groups were willing to make radical changes to their existing lifestyles. As noted in the first concept in 4.1 above, environmental action is adopted within the context of existing daily practices and adopting a radically alternative lifestyle can be perceived as being 'risky' in social acceptance terms. As the

quotation above reveals from a respondent (who held generally pro-environmental *attitudes*), there was an unwillingness to adopt what they perceived to be a socially undesirable set of practices.

The implication for policy-makers is that emphasis needs to be placed on effecting incremental behavioural shifts. As the third concept in section 4.1 above intimates, this is most likely to be effective when behavioural change is framed within socially 'desirable' contexts. This emphasis is most effective when speaking to 'non-environmentalist' groups. In contrast, those in more committed groups may be more open to changing their behaviour 'radically', as the following respondent demonstrated:

"Well I think me and my wife, we're very open to things if they're made easy so any new scheme that comes along" (Committed Environmentalist, Focus Group 3)

The overall implication is therefore that lifestyle groups require nuanced messages according to the level of behavioural change required.

The intention-behaviour gap

"I like taking a really long shower in the morning and nothing is going to stop me although I know I shouldn't in terms of water conservation"
(Occasional environmentalist, Focus Group 5)

The research presented in the Technical Report and the Final Summary Report demonstrated a significant 'gap' between a desire to act in an environmentally responsible manner and reported behaviour. Implicit within many responses to this issue (as demonstrated in the quotation above) was that people 'knew' their behaviour was 'wrong', but they persisted in any case. However, there is evidence from the focus groups that the discord between intentions and actions was mediated by the level of commitment required. Whilst the respondent quoted above reflected on the relative small sacrifice involved in reducing the length of a shower, the following committed environmentalist was more concerned with a more radical activity:

"Well like with water. I know if I've got a dirty washing up bowl I should empty it outside on the plants but it's cold and it's wet and it's the middle of the night so I don't, it goes down the drain instead. And I think it does worry me something because I think 'I should be doing this'" (Committed environmentalist, Focus Group 3)

The implication of this finding is that policy needs to set relative levels of 'expectation' in terms of behavioural commitment, such that intentions can more effectively be transferred (partially) into actions. **Setting 'the bar' too high will exclude certain lifestyle groups, who will not feel able to undertake the behaviours being recommended.**

Identifying and acting to remove barriers

Building on the second and third concepts outlined in section 4.1 above, the more effective transformation of relative intentions into actions was clearly seen as being dependant on the removal of specific barriers to behaviour. Different groups identified alternative sets of barriers. These are detailed both in the Technical Report and expanded upon in the Final Summary Report. Some of these barriers are structural, relating to facilities provided for specific activities such as recycling. However, others are related to two key issues that have significant policy implications.

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Accepting personal responsibility

Emphasised in different ways by each of the lifestyle groups, the ascription of responsibility for environmental problems was framed in varying terms. For the committed environmentalists, responsibility was more an issue that lay with the individual. As this respondent stated:

"Well I think we should be able to [take action] regardless [of external factors]"
(Committed environmentalist, Focus Group 3)

However, although the Technical Report and focus groups show that committed individuals were aware of their responsibilities, those in less committed groups framed responsibility in terms of organisational contexts, from the national to international level:

"Yeah, I feel the same way like what am I gonna do. America isn't even signing up to the Kyoto Agreement and you think it's such a big country and if it's not doing that and their petrol is so cheap, then what difference am I going to make? I care about the environment but don't see that I'll make a difference"
(Non-environmentalist, Focus Group 8)

The policy implication of these varying levels of ascribed responsibility is that **alternative lifestyle groups require different messages to engender or reinforce levels of personal responsibility**. In the case of less committed individuals, this must be seen within the context of 'trust' in 'official' information and policy-making, where levels of response efficacy are particularly low.

The role of 'big business'

All of the lifestyle groups highlighted the role of what was termed 'big business' in 'preventing' environmental action. Once again, emphasis was nuanced between the groups. Committed environmentalists often tended not to shop in supermarkets, but implicitly recognised the barriers encountered by those who felt they 'had to':

"I think a high percentage [explaining why people use supermarkets] is cost because as an example, the farmer's market, which I highly support, is much more expensive than anything you can buy in the supermarket"
(Committed Environmentalist, Focus Group 3)

Many respondents saw supermarkets as being convenient and when asked whether more 'local' shops would change behavioural practice, a typical response was:

"It would still only make as convenient as the supermarkets but it wouldn't ever be more convenient so I don't think it'd change mine either as you'd always get more choice at the supermarket" (Occasional environmentalist, Focus Group 5)

The clear implication of this finding is that for those who are less willing to adopt radically alternative consumption patterns, **policy-makers need to work with supermarkets to promote more sustainable consumption practices**, both in terms of their own purchasing and production mechanisms and also how consumers are engaged to purchase 'alternative' products. This is particularly challenging given the scepticism with which all groups viewed supermarkets. One means by which 'big business' might tackle this issue is by developing a series

of brands that can be targeted at specific lifestyle groups. The research provided in the Final Summary Report clearly demonstrates that brands can be utilised as powerful social marketing tools for influencing behaviour change. Two comments from participants emphasise this point:

"It's just that the brands that I buy, I know I'm going to get quality, I know that I'll get what I get for the price, and I get stuck to it because of that"
(Non-environmentalist, Focus Group 6)

"Yeah or when you go to a certain store because you know if you walk in there you'll find a style you'll like because you know what their style is and things along those lines" (Non-environmentalist, Focus Group 6)

Collective action

The low levels of response efficacy reported in the preceding sections by those less committed to environmental action is reflected both in the data from the Technical Report and Final Summary Report. All groups argued that collective action was necessary to achieve the goals of sustainability, although they viewed their own specific roles within this very differently. Committed environmentalists not surprisingly saw themselves as 'awareness raisers' for collective action:

"Yeah, like word of mouth. Me telling that girl to put her rubbish in the bins provided probably made her more aware to do it in future"
(Committed environmentalist, Focus Group 3)

However, those less committed, whilst recognising the benefits of collective action, focused more on why it wasn't feasible:

"...it's everyone and we're just one person. So if we do something, then it doesn't actually do much unless we all do something"
(Occasional environmentalist, Focus Group 5)

Policy-makers should therefore consider how those who are more committed to environmental action can be involved in raising awareness. Committed environmentalists can act as community champions – establishing norms for environmental action, by demonstrating levels of commitment that can be used to counter arguments of weak response efficacy. Successful schemes such as Global Action Plan's (2005) 'Small Change' and EcoTeams programmes are good examples of these community-led programmes. This links explicitly to our third concept in section 4.1, related to social marketing as a tool for changing behaviour.

Incentives, not penalties

One final observation from this study is that all groups highlighted incentives as a way forward. Given the wide spectrum of environmentalism observed between the different lifestyle groups, incentive schemes would need to be targeted at particular clusters and should reflect the level of the behavioural shift required. However, it is likely that forms of **incentives could play a significant role in bolstering community-based social marketing campaigns amongst specific lifestyle groups**. This should be seen within the context of branding, which the Final Summary Report highlights as a major element in determining individual lifestyle choices.

4.3 Suggestions for further research

The major implication for further research in this area is to develop workable strategies for promoting environmental action through the use of key social marketing concepts, such as, community champions, branding and the use of incentives within a community context. The findings from this research demonstrate the role that social marketing might play in encouraging environmental action within three specific contexts.

1. The role committed environmentalists might play in encouraging others through **community-based social marketing strategies**, which rely on key social actors in a community promoting particular types of behaviour. This has been highlighted in terms of the role that 'Community Champions' can play in developing collective behaviour by charities such as Global Action Plan. Crucially, our findings imply that the reinforcement of a sense of collective action at the local level is likely to tackle low levels of response efficacy highlighted in the research. The role of 'champions' needs to be considered alongside both branding and the use of incentives.
2. The role that **branding** can play in both promoting environmental action amongst key groups and, in tandem, enabling businesses (who have a negative perception amongst some lifestyle segments) to brand and market more sustainable forms of consumption to key market segments. Further research is needed to assess how environmental 'brands' could be used to convince specific lifestyle groups enough to change their behaviour.
3. Related to the notion of branding, it seems likely that **incentives** could have a significant impact on environmental behaviour. Our research suggests that targeted incentives would encourage individuals to be more pro-environmental and, once again, could be linked to sustainable forms of consumption promoted by businesses. Further research is required to examine what level incentives would be required, at which spatial scales and exactly what behaviours would need to be targeted at specific lifestyle groups.

5. Supplementary information

Suggested Further Reading

- Barr, S. and Gilg, A. W. (2003) *Environmental Action and Around the Home*. Final report for the Economic and Social Research Council, Swindon. Available from www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk
- Barr, S. ,Gilg, A. W. and Ford, N. J. (2005) 'The Household Energy Gap: the divide between habitual and purchase-related conservation behaviours'. *Energy Policy* 33 (11), pp. 1425-1444
- DEFRA (2005) *Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles: a social marketing approach: technical report* (DEFRA, 2005)
- DEFRA (2006) *Promoting Sustainable Lifestyles: a social marketing approach: final summary report* (DEFRA, 2006)
- Global Action Plan (2005) 'EcoTeams' www.globalactionplan.org.uk. Accessed 5th December 2005
- McKenzie-Mohr, D. (2000) 'New Ways to Promote Proenvironmental Behavior: Promoting Sustainable Behavior: An Introduction to Community-Based Social Marketing' *Journal of Social Issues* 56 (3), pp. 543-554
- National Social Marketing Centre for Excellence (NSMS) (2005) *Social Marketing Pocket Guide* (NSMS / Department of Health, London)

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