

## MOTIVATING HOME ENERGY ACTION

### Fact sheet 2 - Understanding the householder

Motivating home energy action is much easier if you understand the concerns and needs of the householders you want to motivate. With this knowledge, you can tailor home energy action programs that will appeal to them and that they can easily act on.

#### DEMOGRAPHICS OF AUSTRALIAN HOUSEHOLDS

Demographic changes have had a big impact on home energy use

##### Number and size of households

Increasing numbers of households has resulted in increases in total home energy use:

- the number of householders per Australian household nearly halved between 1911 and 1991, and
- the number of households is expected to increase by between 38 and 46 per cent between 1996 and 2021.

##### An ageing population

Age demographics have mixed effects on energy consumption. Studies have found that the older the householder, the less they are willing to reduce the temperature at which they heat their home. On the other hand, older householders tend to use less fuel for personal transport than younger householders.

- the proportion of the Australian population aged 65 and over is expected to grow from five per cent in 1996 to seven per cent in 2021.

##### Income

- higher-income households tend to consume much more energy than lower ones, even though they may live in more energy efficient homes, and
- low-income households often have the greatest need for improved energy efficiency, but the least ability to invest in energy efficient measures.

#### HOW DO HOUSEHOLDERS USE ENERGY?

Householders use energy both consciously and unconsciously in their daily lives. In some cases they are also constrained by the design of their homes from taking certain energy actions:

##### Day-to-day actions

Many day-to-day energy actions (such as hot showers) are habitual, so it can be difficult for householders to change how they act.

##### One-off energy actions

It can be easier to sustain energy savings from one-off energy actions, since they don't require ongoing energy saving activity. For example, once a heater thermostat is lowered, it does not require effort or attention for continued lower energy use.

##### Reducing energy use or making homes more energy efficient

The choice and date of home construction has a big impact on energy consumption throughout the building's life. It can also affect the potential for future energy saving actions. Take care that policies and programs targeting efficiency improvements do not restrict the potential for energy reduction options in the future.

#### WHAT MOTIVATES HOUSEHOLDERS TO USE OR SAVE ENERGY?

##### a) Money

- The cost of energy is not a great motivator for taking home energy action. In Australia, energy used in homes is relatively cheap. The proportion of household income spent on home energy use is on average less than three per cent. It rarely exceeds five per cent.
- Up-front costs can put householders off taking home energy actions, even when the total cost is less than the total financial savings.

##### b) Self-esteem

- The actions that householders take can be strongly motivated by a need for self-esteem. Householders sometimes associate conserving energy with being poor.
- Energy conservation appeals, especially those that emphasise dollar savings, will turn away householders who consume to boost their self-esteem. To overcome these perceptions, use terms with positive connotations, for example 'energy efficiency' or 'greenhouse action'.

##### c) Choice and control

- Householders are happier and healthier when they feel they have some control over their lives. This principle can be used to encourage energy saving.
- Householders are more likely to take environmental actions if they believe they can bring about change through their own actions. Energy action programs need to underline the positive impact that each person's actions have.



## MOTIVATING HOME ENERGY ACTION

### Fact sheet 2 - Understanding the householder (continued)

#### d) Environmental concerns

- Individuals' environmental concerns often have little direct impact on their actions, but tapping into positive attitudes can be an effective strategy to motivate home energy action.

#### e) Lack of knowledge

- Householders have preconceived notions of the value of home energy efficiency investments, even though they lack knowledge about personal energy use.
- They frequently inaccurately estimate things such as the duration of their hot showers, or the size of their homes.
- They will answer questions about how they use energy in their homes even when they do not know the answer.
- They usually know the average dollar value of their utility bills, but not how many units of electricity or gas they use.

- broken hot water system, and task versus area energy use - some householders use lighting, heating and cooling only for the space they occupy. Others use these services for a wider area.

#### Social influences

Energy use has a social role. Householders use energy to fit in with their society, and attach social perceptions to its use, for example the status of driving a car rather than catching a bus, or hanging clothes on a balcony rather than using a clothes drier. Cultural practices and social expectations also impact on how different technologies are adopted.

#### Cultural influences

A study explored why most householders did not draught proof their homes and found several complex reasons for the lack of action. It found householders' actions are influenced by the way they feel about their home and the way they feel about doing different jobs in the home.

## WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE ENERGY USE?

### Householder energy preferences

The reasons householders select and use certain appliances can vary enormously. US Research has identified two categories for household electricity needs - personal benefits and consumer concerns.

#### Personal benefits:

- comfort - such as heating and cooling
- convenience - such as that offered by microwave ovens
- high-tech enthusiasm - wanting the latest technological equipment, and
- appearance - wanting the best appliances or those that look appealing.

#### Consumer concerns about energy use:

- energy conservation - important to most householders for cost reasons and to save electricity for future generations
- personal control - some householders don't mind their energy use being modified by a utility, but others want complete personal control
- safety - of appliances is seen as very important
- search minimisation - some householders don't want to compare prices or operating costs when replacing an appliance, particularly in an emergency such as a

The potential for householders to save energy also depends on characteristics specific to their home:

- the macro and micro climatic context to their home
- the physical structure of their particular home
- the set of appliances and technologies particular to their home, and
- how they use their homes and the technologies in them.

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