

# COOL communities

## MOTIVATING HOME ENERGY ACTION

### Fact sheet 7 - Social and cultural influences

One study found that the best predictor of intention to purchase solar energy equipment was the number of acquaintances who owned solar equipment. Social networks are influential because:

- they are seen as trustworthy
- their actions are an experiment for friends and associates who monitor results and act accordingly
- information received from friends and associates is a vivid case study, and
- friends and associates are likely to share socio-economic status and can take similar cost energy actions.

Social reference groups are most important for middle and upper income households. Low-income groups are influenced by programs run by community groups.

#### THE ESSENTIAL FEATURE OF A COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Home energy action programs must take into account these social and cultural influences. Program managers can't change the culture they operate in but understanding it will allow appropriate energy actions and motivating strategies to be selected.

#### TYPES OF COMMUNITY ACTION STRATEGIES

A word of warning: regulations and strong social pressure strategies must be used carefully. If householders feel constrained in their actions, they may do the opposite of what you want them to.

The following strategies may be used singly, but a combination of two or more can deliver powerful results:

##### Use demonstration households

- choose a household that is highly visible and credible in the community
- measure its base level of energy use
- conduct a home energy audit to determine which simple technologies to install
- help the householder with installation
- measure the subsequent level of energy use, and
- encourage the householder to teach family, friends and acquaintances what they have learned.

##### Use existing informal social networks

A US study found 70 per cent of householders discussed energy bills with other people. Use this word-of-mouth network to communicate energy messages.

##### Encourage a public commitment to saving energy

Commitment strategies can have a long-term effect well beyond the initial commitment date.

##### Encourage 'adaptive muddling'

Adaptive muddling allows householders to experiment with energy saving actions appropriate to their own home, rather than being part of a larger program.

##### Make energy actions visible

Measures such as installing insulation are often invisible to friends and neighbours. With research a program could be introduced to provide householders with a sign suitable for fixing to their letterbox to promote their energy saving action.

##### Set up a competition between groups

Social feedback can be more effective if it is competitive. Provide examples of how much energy a household or other group is saving compared to an identified competitor in the program.

##### Have community groups run programs

Providing a one-stop-shop for householders makes it easy for them to choose several energy actions at once. Community groups are particularly effective at reaching low-income groups, minority groups and the elderly.

##### Involve the community

Involving members of the community in planning and implementing home energy action programs has several benefits:

- they can help explain how householders think about home energy use and the language they use to describe their energy use
- they can help decide on the most effective sites for physical program elements, for example greenhouse audits in a hardware store, and
- they can provide valuable contacts for energy action strategies.



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## MOTIVATING HOME ENERGY ACTION

### Fact sheet 7 - Social and cultural influences (continued)

Program managers must consult widely with:

- different ethnic groups
- low, medium and high income groups
- home owners, renters and landlords, and
- different age groups.

Involving community members in the development and delivery of the program ensures that local knowledge determines the type of strategy implemented and that it is trusted by the community.

Consider setting up a community advisory panel early in the development of the program to achieve these aims.

**COOL communities** are wise communities

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For further information you can visit the Cool Communities website at: [www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities/index.html](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities/index.html)  
The full *Motivating Home Energy Action* handbook is online at: [www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities/motivating/index.html](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/coolcommunities/motivating/index.html)

You can also contact: **Australian Greenhouse Office, Community Partnerships Team, GPO Box 621, Canberra ACT 2601**  
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