

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

The ConsEnSus (Consumption, Environment and Sustainability) Project is a four-year research project involving collaboration between TCD and NUI, Galway. The ConsEnSus Project is funded by the EPA under the STRIVE programme. This project focuses on four key areas of household consumption: transport, energy, water and food.

As part of the ConsEnSus Project, the Lifestyle Survey was conducted over a ten-month period between June 2010 and April 2011. The aim of this Lifestyle Survey was to gain an understanding of people's attitudes and behaviours towards sustainable household consumption and sustainable lifestyles. A total of 1,500 households (750 urban based/750 rural based) were surveyed in 30 EDs across Galway City and County Council areas, Derry City Council area, Limavady District Council area, Dublin City Council area and Fingal County Council area.

Further information is available at: www.consensus.ie

Information and Awareness

Research suggests that comprehensive information is required in order for individuals to make informed decisions about sustainable consumption (Jackson, 2005). The assumption here is that once individuals become aware of an environmental problem, they will utilise this information to make more sustainable decisions regarding their lifestyle choices. This factsheet will highlight the respondents' reported levels of awareness towards a number of resource efficient instruments and devices; as well as the respondents' own perceived levels of information.

Do respondents feel well informed about the environmental impact of the products they use?

- Over half of the respondents surveyed (59%, n=883) stated that they were well informed about the environmental impact of the products they used.
- Slightly more men (61%) than women (58%) felt that they were well informed about the environmental impact of the products.

Role of government

When the respondents were asked the question: 'what action should the government focus on first; in order to help protect the environment?'

- Almost one fifth of those surveyed (19%) stated that the government should provide people with more information and education about energy efficiency (n=279) (see Table 8.1).

Levels of awareness

- The majority of respondents (79%, n=1,190) stated that they were aware of the availability of government grants and subsidies targeted at making their homes more energy efficient.
- Only 5% of all respondents reported availing of a grant in the past five years to make their homes more energy efficient (n= 71).
- Almost half of the respondents (48%, n=719), prior to participating in this survey, had never heard about the existence of energy meters and smart meters.
- Over one third of the respondents surveyed (38%, n=566) were unaware of the existence of 'low-flow shower heads'.
- 47% of respondents were unaware of the existence of water butts, as a water-saving device (n= 710) (see Figure 8.1).

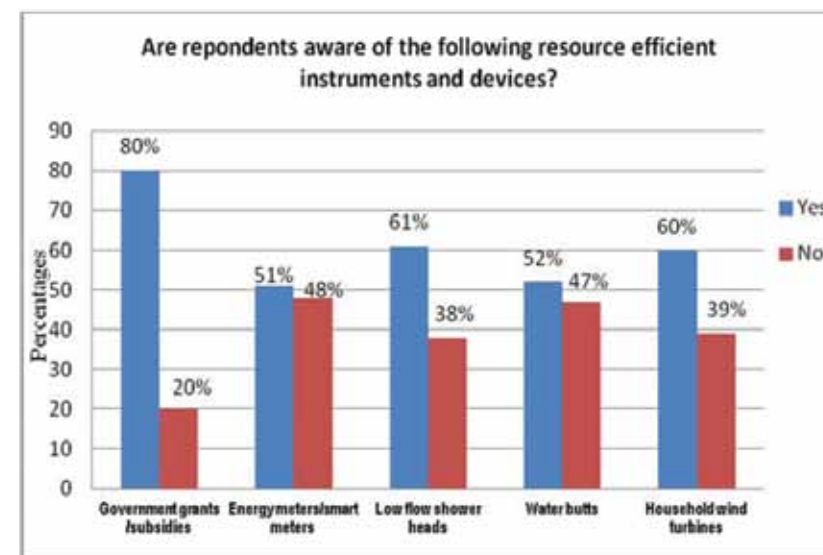


Figure 8.1: Levels of awareness amongst respondents towards resource efficient policy instruments and devices.



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Table 8.1: What action should the government focus on first in order to protect the environment?

What government action is needed?	Frequency	Percentages
Use more energy from renewable sources	575	38%
Improve technology to make appliances more energy efficient	287	19%
Provide more education & information on energy efficiency	279	19%
Create more laws	207	14%
Create more taxes & levies	68	5%
All of the above	23	2%
Nothing at all – the government do not need to take any action	10	1%
Other	36	2%

Implications

The results of this study indicated that almost one third of all respondents reported not being well informed about the environmental impact of the products they used. However, this could be viewed as a positive finding when considered in light of the results of a previous national survey on attitudes and actions (Drury Research Study) conducted in Ireland in 2000, which indicated that over three quarters of the respondents were not well informed about environmental issues and stated that they wanted more information.

In terms of reported levels of environmental awareness, Ireland appears to be in line with many other European countries; with 59% of the respondents in this study stating that they felt well informed of the environmental impacts of products in comparison to 55% of respondents in a recent Eurobarometer Study (2009).

These findings highlight the existence of a value action gap. Although reported levels of awareness about the availability of government grants and subsidies were very high, very few respondents had actually availed of such grants. Hence, these results indicate that although the provision of readily available and accessible information is an important aspect of sustainable decision making, attention must be given to the wider, structural, societal and personal factors that can also impact on a person's behaviour.

References

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