

**Sustainable Households –
changing the way we think of and use our resources**

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Sustainability is a big issue and one with which Councils, regional, district or unitary, are coming to grips.

Councils are making strategies and plans under the 2002 Local Government Act, which include sustainability and thus promoting and developing sustainable actions by ratepayers.

There are some great resources that have been developed for schools, like the Enviroschools programme, the Environmental Education guidelines and regional advisors, and in-school waste management programmes.

The commercial world too has access to a fair amount of good material and methods including The Natural Step framework, Business Care, Enviromark, ISO 14001, Green Globe 21 and a number of other standards-based systems.

What though is there for householders? That was the problem we asked ourselves three years ago, at a meeting of environmental educators, mostly people based within Councils.

Households are big consumers of resources and significant generators of waste.

Where do they go to find good, reliable information on which to make decisions? Do they need to be more sustainable or is it conveniently someone else's problem, such as 'The Council'?

You could argue till the cows have come home, been milked and settled in for the night that indeed it is someone else's problem at root cause, but that doesn't change things very fast.

Greenpeace (and other campaigners) use a saying that is familiar, although often the important last phrase is left off: **Think globally, act locally, RESPOND PERSONALLY.**

That interest in what we can do ourselves is where the concept for Sustainable Households came from.

To give good information and impetus to householders so they could affect changes in their daily lives that make a positive difference to the environment. If along the way these changes could help promote good health and save money, all the better.

Why is it a local authority programme?

Sustainable Households takes the bits and pieces we already do in waste minimization, environmental and consumer education and offers a holistic package which offers information on what sustainability is about, plus six topics: waste, shopping, water, gardening, travel and energy. Two new topics are in the development stage for 2004, on building materials and organic food growing. Most of these topics connect with the statutory concerns and duties of councils.

The key to the Sustainable Households programme though, is in the delivery.

It is a facilitated programme that delivers the information through a variety of methods. It has been based on successful programmes overseas and adapted in a New Zealand style.

The pilot programme that has been trialled since 2001 in a number of areas by local and regional authorities around New Zealand, from bigger cities to smaller townships, both in the North and South Island. Approaches to delivery have ranged from traditionally-tutored night classes where people pay to attend, to community centre meeting series to larger open meetings which are free and include participants being given products to trial. There has even been a workplace study group.

As there are a number of ways to facilitate the programme, some Councils have used their own staff as facilitators, others have contracted environment centres or educational trusts to deliver the programme. The facilitator's guide helps even novices to lead the study groups, provided they have the confidence and people-skills to make a start. Guests with expert environmental knowledge can be brought in if required for different topics.

Evaluation is being undertaken to see if longer-term behaviour change is indeed taking place. Trialled materials have been revised, tested and edited three times already with significant feedback obtained from both participants and facilitators to improve the materials' content and make them user friendly. Evaluation information will be presented at the WasteMINZ session and at a later Environmental Education Conference (NZAEE, Christchurch 14-17 Jan 2004)

A Maori peer review has been undertaken recently, to help give a more bicultural approach and see what value can be added to the appeal and uptake of the programme, whose initial authors are of European background.

Great networks have been set up, so that those with skills, knowledge and experience in the topics can review the information and its use in the Sustainable Households programme.

Where to from here?

We want to help you to deliver Sustainable Households in your area, to promote active citizens who 'do their bit' for the environment.

By July 2004, we will have available the full package of information you'll need to deliver Sustainable Households in your area:

We have a Powerpoint presentation to help you to introduce the programme to your staff and councillors.

Our final edit, with graphics (we already have photo illustrations) will be on a CD ROM so you can read and edit the information to suit your region and your Council's needs and priorities, at low cost, before publication.

Facilitator's guides will be available for each topic.

In-depth evaluation report will be available so you can see the delivery techniques used and results that have been achieved by the regions that have trialled Sustainable Households.

A list of contact people will also be available, so you can talk directly to those who ran the programmes and you will be able to get your information straight from those who had first hand experience.

We are investigating scope for creating a national website to support the programme.

What sort of information do participants get?

Have a look at the information that follows, taken from an early draft of the shopping topic introductory pages. Remember this is only information, and information is only as good as the way it will be delivered and used!

The key to the Sustainable Households programme is for the facilitator to engage and motivate people to change and to offer them appropriate information and ways to take practical action. Facilitators have a tool kit to help deliver each topic and use programmes and activities that help aid discussion and keep the information flowing.

How can I present this back at the office to my colleagues and Council?

We have included a copy of a powerpoint presentation developed recently for Environment Canterbury – it could easily be adapted for use in other Councils.

Who is the programme supported by?

Sustainable Households pilot stage has been funded through the Ministry for the Environment’s Sustainable Management Fund, and by the participating Councils, and we thank them for the opportunity to develop and deliver this exciting programme.

We would also like to thank all of those who have given their time and expertise from public participants through to specialist professionals. The team has been drawn from: Environment Canterbury, Christchurch City Council, Christchurch Environment Centre, Nelson City Council & Nelson Environment Centre, Tasman District Council, Ecofest and Golden Bay Environment Centre, Marlborough District Council, Wellington Regional Council, Hutt City Council, Auckland Regional Council, North Shore City Council and K.E.R.P., Waitakere City Council, Environment Waikato, Hamilton City Council; and Ministry for the Environment.

Councils who would like to join the programme in 2004 are invited to make contact.

Contact list below.

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popular leisure activity outside the home. It is firmly ahead of eating-out, sports participation, walking, gardening, theatre, etc.

Shopping and the impacts of consumerism

We are *consumers* in the literal dictionary sense - we no longer hunt but we gather and use. And after our use, there is only waste, which is carted away unseen.

Ever since the industrial era developed, manufacturers have offered 'new' and 'the latest' as a sales pitch.

Many people accumulate large quantities of 'stuff' in their homes and yet are still not satisfied, while neighbours who have very little materially, as long as they are well-fed and warm, seem to be content.

In the USA the average citizen shops for over six hours a week.,

In New Zealand, the USA and many other 'rich' countries, the material gulf between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% of the population has widened in the past two decades.

in North America a new condition has been dubbed '**Affluenza**', a new noun defined as: "1. *The bloated, sluggish and unfulfilled feeling that results from efforts to keep up with the Joneses.* 2. *An epidemic of stress, overwork, waste and indebtedness caused by dogged pursuit of the American dream.*"

Do you have Affluenza too?

Try the website: <http://www.pbs.org/kcts/affluenza/diag/have.html> or see if the group leader or tutor already has a copy of their 'quiz'.

In the USA and Canada people looking for more from less have started a 'Voluntary Simplicity Movement' promoting lower and more sustainable consumption levels (Examples inc.: The Center for a New American Dream <http://www.newdream.org/> ; Seeds of Simplicity <http://www.seedsofsimplicity.org> ; and the Simple Living Network <http://www.simpleliving.net/>)

Consumer choice

Whenever we buy goods we make choices and show our preferences.

How much are you consciously aware of making your shopping choices?

Why do you select what you buy from the choices available, and *where* you usually go to shop? Do you know what sub-consciously informs your shopping 'habits'?

The commercial world has great interest in these questions and invests huge sums in both marketing research and advertising, trying to influence our 'consumer choices':

- **building 'demand' for the type of product** e.g. advertisements promoting large four wheel drive 'sport utility' vehicles to wealthier city residents who yearn for the NZ outdoors but are too busy earning in the city to experience much countryside;
- **establishing an identifiable brand name** for product ranges, e.g. a particular shoe brand which seeks to be closely associated with winning sports people;
- **repetitively promoting a named retailer** for its 'bargains' on price or its conveniently located large range of goods, so that you are persuaded to *start* your shopping trip there rather than with competitors; and
- **directing** your attention once at the '**point of sale**' with special offers, key facts, bold colour displays, (e.g. 'one previous careful owner', 'today's special').

The cost of all this advertising has to be reclaimed from customers, either in high unit sale price (as with luxury European car imports) and/or a greater volume of sales (as with inexpensive plastic items imported from China and Taiwan).

So, what criteria are you aware of using, when making those shopping choices?

If you have not already tried it, pause at this point to consider the activity sheet on your current shopping choices, to see which criteria you are using, and then read on.

Escaping television's incessant sales messages

How does Advertising affect us?

How much does television contribute? In the USA, children watch an average 25 hours of TV per week, which means, by the time they reach their teenage years, that **their TV viewing time exceeds their hours spent in school**. 16% of this viewing time is advertising, or over 10,000 commercials per year.

A survey in NZ found lower levels of TV viewing than these USA figures. The lowest adult television viewing levels were associated with highest income levels (in May 1999, those earning over \$60,000 per year viewed less than 1.5 hours per day on average, from an A C Nielsen survey quoted in *North and South* magazine, Aug 1999).

It is also common for young people to often measure their worth by what they have.

In 2001 three internet web-sites covered international campaigns to '*turn off TV- turn on life*' for a week at the end of April. In 2002 it was April 22-28:

- <http://www.turnitoff.org/>

