

Household Energy Reduction Project

Understanding behavioural change

February
Update

Waterworks Valley Community
Climate Connect Project

What's happening?

Copenhagen has come and gone, and what a disappointment it was!

Getting global agreement to tackle runaway climate change is going to take a little while yet, so sit tight.

Meanwhile, across the world communities of people are taking action, with myriads of small steps. They're building the change that has to happen.

Waterworks Community is just one of a number of Tasmanian initiatives that are helping to create this global transformation.

It's all about re-learning how to live within our means – and doing it with a good dose of fun.



What's this project about?

Ask Tasmanian households if they are concerned about climate change and the vast majority say definitely yes!

Ask them if they would like to reduce their carbon footprint (and save money in the bargain) and the resounding answer is yes!

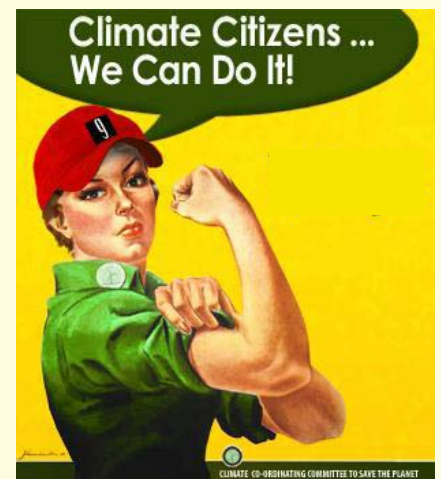
Question: What stop us from doing so?

The fact is, there are lots of 'barriers' that stop us. It's a problem we all share.

In 2009 we received a 'Climate Connect' grant to help understand what these barriers are and how to best overcome them.

Our project area includes Waterworks community and surrounds, including Ridgeway and parts of South Hobart and Dynnyrne.

So.... thank you for being part of this important quest. With your help we have already discovered some interesting facts - and this information will help other communities too.



The human dilemma – a very brief summary

A moral imperative

There's no need to go into the critical importance of climate change - the media is full of it. In short, our modern lifestyles can't be sustained. As a result, we are leaving a legacy of extreme hardship for the next generation of humans (i.e. our own children) and the planetary environment.

This huge moral imperative is causing many people (and politicians) to fall into a spiral of psychological denial, its their way of not coping.

But thankfully, most people in this community are alert to these realities and are making serious attempts, in the busyness of their lives, to change their lifestyle impacts.



We've taken a lead with many projects such as home energy audits, solar bulk purchase schemes, community gardening, walking kids to school... and so forth.

And most people find these community activities uplifting, enjoyable and life-enhancing - a very good antidote to the stresses of modern living. That's the big positive.

Caught in a trap

Yet it's not quite as easy as all that.

Many factors conspire to make the big switch to living sustainably not an easy thing to achieve in an instant:



- our over-full lives,
- our locked-in habits,
- our consumer desires,
- our relative wealth,
- the way our cities have been built around private car travel,
- the low cost of energy,
- what our friends might think,
- our lack of expert knowledge,
- even our lack of fitness.

It's a rather long list.

Which of these barriers apply to you? Probably most of them, and then some!

The art of living sustainably prompts us to try to understand these various forces and learn how to overcome them, one by one.

A living adventure!

In our grandparents' time, energy and resources were scarce and precious - and hard to pay for. They had no choice but to use them wisely. Then year-by-year our society and its trappings evolved, so that now, in 2010, we barely even notice how wastefully and carelessly we gobble things up and clutter our life with possessions we don't really need - and ruin our health with adulterated foods.

The fact is, we've all been born into this mindless culture, and we're all in the same boat.

So acting out of guilt is not sensible. It's a matter of learning how to re-connect, and enjoy a new way of doing things.



The 'Power of Community'

Two things we have learned:

1. Most people wish to do the right thing. So there is a huge reservoir of goodwill if the right triggers can be found to release that goodwill.
2. The power of community: how much easier it is for we citizens to work together than to do things in isolation. (This effect became very evident with the wild success of our solar bulk-purchase scheme.)

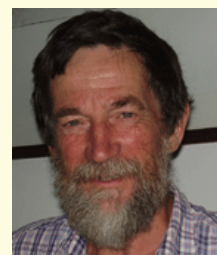
These realisations have spurred on the uprising of 'sustainable community' groups all over the place - like those in South Hobart, Fern Tree, Tarooma, The Channel, Lenah Valley and many towns and communities throughout Australia.

The nitty gritty

So let's go back to where we started. What things stop us from living sustainably?

To help this inquiry, in the last 6 months our project team has doorknocked the neighbourhood, signed on willing participants, developed a project website, conducted a comprehensive online survey. We ran a Sustainable Home Open Day, acquired learning resources and measuring implements, completed some home assessments and in December we held 'Focus Group' discussions on the subject of 'barriers'.

This is our team: Amanda, Jonah, Jacqui, Stuart and Chris.



Doorknocking the neighbourhood

This was hard work but rewarding. We did it during the cold winter.

Most people who were home agreed to participate. So we signed up about 150 homes (= approx 450 people). They filled out our mini-survey on the doorstep.



What did we find out?

1. That most householders in this area are more concerned about climate change than they are about rising energy prices - but they are concerned about both.
2. That most families had tried various ways to improve their home's performance, but with variable results. As expected, there is a very big gap between our concerns and our performances.

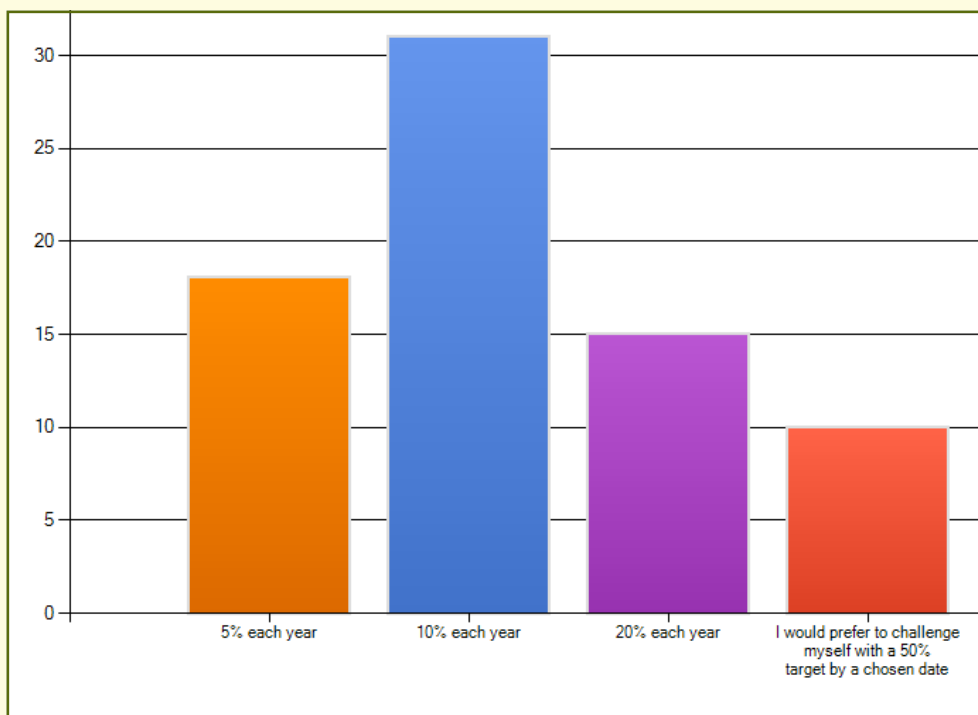
To see the results click: <http://waterworksvally.com/barriers-to-sustainable-living/>.

Surveying our performances

Our **online survey** has been a learning experience, and we got much positive feedback.

The survey asked householders how they are responding to 24 'behaviours' such as dietary habits, transport choices and home energy savings - and what factors made it hard to improve their footprint in those areas.

The most interesting overall result was this one:



Most people chose a target of 10 percent per year energy saving as an achievable target for their homes.

From our experience, we know this is a very achievable target, some have already done much better.

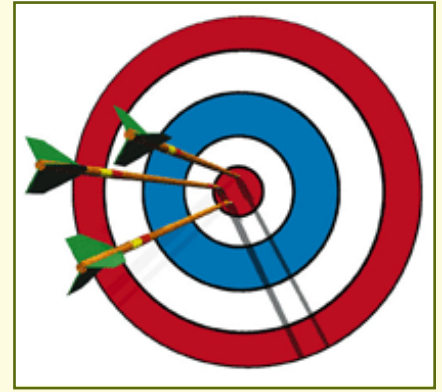
Why choose a target?

Committing to a target is very helpful in helping us to lift our environmental performance. It's something to test ourselves against and challenge ourselves to do better.

Without something solid to aim at we keep thinking about doing things, then our interest just wanes.

The beauty of it is, we're proving that with a bit of effort households can reduce their climate footprint by a solid

10% each year! Compare this with the Australian government's target of **5% by 2020!**



Can you beat the number 5000?

5,000 is the magic number that we suggest you take on.



It's as simple as this: Aurora Energy's statistics say that the average Tasmanian home consumes 10,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. Many homes in our community are striving to do their best, and most are achieving a much lower figure.

Okay, to test your own home's performance, find your last four power bills, then add up the total units of power consumed. You will arrive at your consumption for the past 12 months. (If you haven't

kept your bills you can do it easily online, and even download as a graph.)

For most people, 5,000 kwh is a modest challenge. Can you beat your neighbour?

Want to find out more?

How to change human behaviour is a fascinating study, and a focus of this project.

We have been ably assisted in this discovery by the wonderful Tim Cotter, an environmental psychologist based in Melbourne. Tim runs a website that looks into the barriers that prevent us changing our lifestyles as we would like to do.

Click <http://www.awake.com.au/wakeupnov09.htm> for an interesting look at pledges.

Meanwhile, in future updates we hope to send you interesting aspects of this fascinating work... watch this space.

And please click <http://powerdowntas.org/content/index.php/site/stories/> to see what others are doing - we would love to hear your story! Email us at: wwvalley@dodo.com.au



Issue of the month – what to do about our cars?

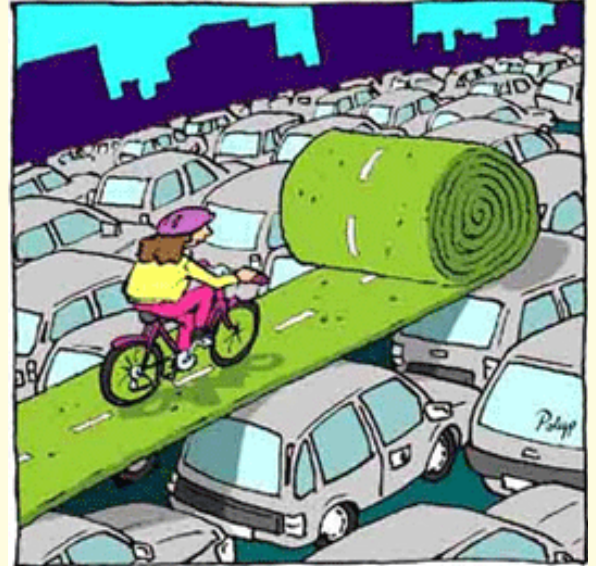
What should I do about my car?

It's a question most of us ask ourselves.

We are addicted to the mobility they give us, and, goddamit!, we need them in order to get to work and many other good purposes. Yet they are the main cause of sedentary lifestyles and therefore the ill health pandemic that is afflicting modern life.

Put simply, the health of our planet and the health of our own bodies are largely tied up with that one object, our cars.

More and more people who want to be fit and healthy and who live in proximity to their work or school or bus stop, are taking up walking or cycling. But you will find that even these households still own a car to get around the place.

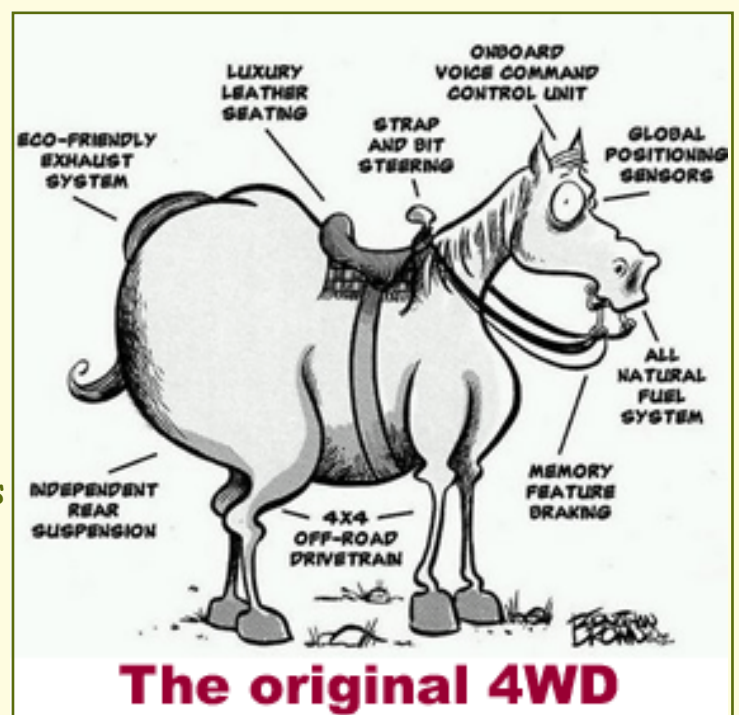


So the status quo is this:

- Each household owns at least one car.
- That car normally weighs about one tonne or more - much bigger than what you need for most trips (average occupancy 1.3 persons per vehicle).
- Petrol prices are expected to double in coming years.

Looming dilemma: but making sensible decisions about car ownership ends up being harder than, say, insulating houses or growing home veggies.

Wouldn't it be so much more sensible to own a very small vehicle and then have access to a shared larger vehicle for the odd occasion when that is needed? (The 'green fleet' idea is already in place in some larger cities. Maybe somebody in Hobart will soon develop a green fleet co-op soon!)



Should I trade in my big car for a more efficient one?

Well, as ironically as it may seem, if you are swapping one 2nd hand car for another 2nd hand car, **nothing is gained in terms of overall energy savings**, because both cars are still on the road and still being used (but you may save yourself some fuel costs).

Turns out your best policy is to keep your old gas guzzler and just commit to using it as little as you can, by reducing your travel needs and using public transport or shoes and bikes for shorter trips as much as possible.

The nub of the problem lies in the fact that the building of a car uses up heaps of energy and resources - about the same energy as 4 years of average driving, or 8 years if you don't drive a lot. So much energy is wrapped up in the making of a car that, once built, it's simply not worth trashing it.

Are very big cars safer than smaller ones?

If size and safety were closely correlated then it would be in everybody's best interest to own the biggest possible car. (i.e. The psychology of the arms race.) Many people do justify owning a very large car on the basis that they want their family to be safer.

However, the size / safety issue is often built around myth rather than fact. A smaller car occupies less road space and is therefore a smaller target and is generally much more manoeuvrable than is a lumpy 4WD, for example. Safety also depends a lot on whether you mostly drive around the city or on open highways (where most serious car crashes occur).

For a look at myths about car size click: <http://www.ptua.org.au/myths/smallcar.shtml>

Multiple travel solutions

People in Waterworks, Ridgeway, Fern Tree and South Hobart have been trying many lateral solutions to their transport dilemma. This is an area where there are many solutions, not just one. We'd like to hear your story.

Take Cathryn - an active resident of Waterworks community. Getting to her workplace in Margate has been a real headache, so she decided to get the smallest possible car, the microscopic 'Smart Car' - so tiny it can park sideways in a parking space!

Then there's Cary's ute that's been borrowed by nearly everyone, there's Eric and Susie's little scooters, there's Greg's patented motorised bike... and there's our ever-so-reliable walking school bus.



Cathryn's fuel miser