

## How Green Are We? Putting Our Money (and Our Behavior) Where Our Mouth Is

*We do some “green things” but could do much more*

**New York, N.Y. — October 13, 2009** — A new Harris Poll finds that many millions of Americans take steps to protect the environment, reduce their energy and water consumption, and reduce their carbon footprint. And these behaviors are highly correlated with their attitudes toward the environment and environmentalism.

Most people have taken some steps to reduce or limit their use of electricity and paper. Many others have taken steps to recycle computers, cell phones or other electronic devices, switched from bottled water to tap water, taken steps to reduce their water consumption, made their homes more energy efficient, or bought a more energy efficient car.

At the same time, this Harris Poll points to the huge potential for much more environmentally friendly behavior. Those who have bought hybrid cars are still only a tiny minority of adults (2%), and large majorities have not engaged in most of the green activities that the survey asked about. Even if they do so, they only do them some of the time.

These are some of the results of [The Harris Poll](#)® of 3,110 adults, surveyed online between July 7 and September 8, 2009 by [Harris Interactive](#).

When asked what environmental activities they have done in *the last year*, the largest number say they have:

- Installed more energy-efficient light bulbs (63%)
- Purchased energy-efficient appliances (36%)
- Started paying bills online (46%)
- Switched to paperless financial statements (40%)
- Donated an electronic device for recycling (41%)
- Switched from bottled to tap water (29%)
- Installed a low-flow showerhead (17%) or a low-flow toilet (16%)
- Made home improvements (e.g., windows, solar panels or insulation) that provided government tax credits (14%)
- Bought a more fuel efficient car (13%)

Indeed, only 13% of all adults say they have not done any of these.

Furthermore, majorities report that they always or often turn lights off when leaving a room (83%), recycle (68%), reuse things they have instead of replacing them (65%), and make an effort to use less water (60%).

While environmentalists may find these behaviors encouraging, this Harris Polls also shows that many people are doing little or nothing to protect the environment and reduce their carbon footprint.

Only small minorities of adults always or often:

- Walk or ride a bicycle instead of driving or using public transport (15%)
- Carpool or use public transport (16%)
- Make compost (17%)
- Purchase organic products (17%)
- Purchase all natural products (18%)
- Purchase used as opposed to new products (25%)
- Purchase locally manufactured products (26%)

Well under half of all adults:

- Buy food in bulk (33%)
- Purchase locally grown produce (39%)
- Unplug electrical appliances when they are not using them (40%)

### **Some adults are much greener than others – and behave accordingly**

In this Harris Poll, adults were divided into four more or less equal segments based on their replies to four simple questions. The four segments are the least green (23%) of all adults, not very green (29%), the somewhat green (25%), and the most green (22%).

The differences in behavior of these four groups are very dramatic and are shown in Tables 1 and 3. For example:

- While 80% of the most green have installed energy efficient lighting and/or appliances, only 52% of the least green have done so.
- Almost half (48%) of the most green adults have switched from bottled to tap water, compared to only 15% of the least green segment.
- Only 15% of the least green, compared to 35% of the most green, have installed low-flow showers or toilets.
- Fully 65% of the most green adults often or always purchase locally grown produce, compared to only 20% of the least green.
- Fully 43% of the most green adults, but only 5% of the least green, always or often purchase all-natural products.
- Fully 44% of the most green, but only 3% of the least green, adults always or often purchase organic products.

### **So what?**

This is not so much a glass that is half empty or half full, but one that is “mostly empty but filling up.” Many people are beginning to take some steps that save energy or water and reduce their carbon footprint, to slow global warming. As such, this poll is encouraging in showing that it is possible to change human behavior in ways that can make a difference. But – to mix metaphors – we have only scratched the surface of what is possible.

We also need to make one other point. These numbers may be overestimates of some behaviors. There is a tendency for people to give “socially desirable” answers and surveys tend therefore to overestimate the number of people doing socially desirable things (from going to church to driving below the speed limit). Online surveys such as this tend to produce lower (and more accurate) measures of socially desirable behaviors probably because respondents are replying to questions from a computer, not a human interviewer.

**TABLE 1**  
**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVITIES IN LAST YEAR**

“Which of the following environmental activities, if any, have you done within the past year?”

Base: All adults

	Total	Green-ness			
		Least 1	2	3	Most 4
<b>Energy-Efficient Lighting/Appliances [NET]</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>80</b>
Replaced regular light bulbs with more energy-efficient lighting (e.g., CFLs, LEDs)	63	48	64	67	75
Purchased energy-efficient (e.g., Energy Star) appliances	36	21	37	41	45
<b>Paperless Statements/Online Bill Pay [NET]</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>59</b>
Started paying bills online for my personal financial accounts	46	37	47	47	52
Switched to paperless statements for my personal financial accounts	40	29	39	43	48
<b>Donated or recycled a computer, cell phone or other electronic device or its parts</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>Switched from bottled water to filtered tap water</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Low-Flow Showerhead/Toilet [NET]</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>
Installed a low-flow showerhead	17	10	15	20	24
Installed a low-flow toilet	16	8	15	19	24
<b>Patronized/Avoided a Business [NET]</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>35</b>
Patronized a business because of their environmental activities	11	1	5	13	27
Avoided patronizing a business because of their environmental activities (or lack thereof)	9	1	4	11	23
<b>Made home improvements that enabled me to take advantage of a ‘green’ government tax credit (e.g., installed dual-pane windows, solar panels, insulation)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Hybrid/Fuel-Efficient Car [NET]</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18</b>
Purchased a more fuel-efficient car that is not a hybrid	11	6	10	14	16
Purchased a hybrid car	2	1	*	2	3
None of these	13	28	11	10	4

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% because of rounding, the acceptance of multiple responses, and the exclusion of “other”.

Note: We calculated respondents’ “greenness” by taking the average of their answers to four questions (see Table 4) asking how well various terms related to the environment described them. Respondents were then divided into four quartiles ranging from low environmental identification to high.

**TABLE 2**  
**FREQUENCY OF VARIOUS GREEN BEHAVIORS**  
 “How often do you do each of the following in your daily life?”

Base: All adults

		<b>Always</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Always/ Often [NET]</b>
Keep unneeded lights off or turn lights off when leaving a room	%	46	37	12	3	2	83
Recycle	%	42	26	19	8	5	68
Reuse things that I have instead of throwing them away or buying new items	%	27	38	26	6	4	65
Make an effort to use less water	%	26	33	27	8	6	60
Unplug electrical appliances when I am not using them	%	16	24	26	18	15	40
Purchase locally grown produce	%	7	32	40	13	8	39
Buy food in bulk	%	7	26	38	18	12	33
Purchase locally manufactured products	%	4	22	45	19	10	26
Purchase used items rather than new	%	4	22	40	22	12	25
Purchase all-natural products	%	3	16	40	27	14	18
Purchase organic products	%	2	15	38	26	18	17
Compost food and organic waste	%	8	9	14	16	53	17
Carpool or take public transportation	%	6	10	18	24	41	16
Walk or ride a bike instead of driving or using public transportation	%	5	11	22	25	38	15

**TABLE 3**  
**FRQUENCY OF VARIOUS GREEN BEHAVIORS – BY GREEN-NESS**  
 “How often do you do each of the following in your daily life?”  
 [ALWAYS/OFTEN (NET)]

Base: All adults

	Total	GREEN-NESS			
		Least 1	2	3	Most 4
	%	%	%	%	%
Keep unneeded lights off or turn lights off when leaving a room	83	73	84	82	94
Recycle	68	48	64	72	89
Reuse things that I have instead of throwing them away or buying new items	65	46	62	69	85
Make an effort to use less water	60	40	55	66	80
Unplug electrical appliances when I am not using them	40	25	35	39	63
Purchase locally grown produce	39	20	31	42	65
Buy food in bulk	33	19	28	34	52
Purchase locally manufactured products	26	11	19	29	49
Purchased used items rather than new	25	14	21	26	42
Purchase all-natural products	18	5	11	18	43
Purchase organic products	17	3	10	16	44
Compost food and organic waste	17	6	9	20	37
Carpool or take public transportation	16	9	11	17	28
Walk or ride a bike instead of driving or using public transportation	15	6	11	14	31

**TABLE 4**  
**SELF IDENTIFYING AS ‘GREEN’**

“To what extent, if any, does each of the following statements describe you?”

Base: All adults

		Describes Me Completely	Describes Me Very Well	Describes Me Fairly Well	Describes Me Somewhat Well	Does Not Describe Me At All	DESCRIBES ME VERY WELL/ COMPLETELY (NET)
I am environmentally-conscious	%	9	22	32	28	10	30
I am a conservationist	%	6	11	28	30	25	17
I am an environmentalist	%	5	9	20	27	40	13
I am ‘green’	%	4	9	27	34	27	13

**The Harris Poll® #112, October 13, 2009**  
 By Humphrey Taylor, Chairman, *The Harris Poll*

## **Methodology**

This *Harris Poll* was conducted online within the United States July 7 and September 8, 2009, among 3,110 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

*These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.*

## **About Harris Interactive**

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