

Poll: Being 'Green' Means Lots Of Talk, No Walk

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WASHINGTON (AP) — A solid majority of Americans recognize the need to help the environment, although there are some things — like buying a hybrid car or taking mass transit — that people often talk about, but don't necessarily act on.

That's shown in a survey of more than 1,000 adults that sought to gauge attitudes about the environment.

The telephone poll, conducted for The Associated Press and NBC Universal, found that 60 percent of those surveyed felt either a "great deal" or "a lot" of personal responsibility to protect the environment, while 37 percent rarely, if ever, even thought about the impact of their actions on the Earth's health.

Nearly 8 of 10 people who were concerned about environmental protection said they believe their actions are helping to protect the environment, according to the poll released Tuesday. It found that people have largely accepted recycling bottles and cans — about 7 in 10 people said they're likely to do it — and are inclined to find ways to cut electricity or heating costs, also to benefit the environment.

A little more than 6 of 10 said buying energy-efficient appliances, using recycled paper products and car pooling also help a lot. A little more than half said it would make a lot of difference to turn down the thermostat, reuse water bottles and take your own reusable bag when grocery shopping.

While many of the respondents said these actions would help the environment "a great deal," or at least "a lot," when asked about some specific actions, the gap widened between what they believe to be important and what they have any intention of doing.

In some cases, the inability to turn their green priorities into action reflected geography or economics.

Take the matter of car pooling or using mass transit. More than 6 in 10 people said they thought it would help the environment. Yet only 3 in 10 said they were very likely to do it, and 4 in 10 said they were not at all likely to car pool or take mass transit.

A third of those surveyed lived in rural areas where mass transit was generally not readily available and where car pooling would be less likely.

Yet, only 44 percent of urbanites and 32 percent of people living in the suburbs also said they were very likely to use mass transit or car pool.

Janice Meehl, 54, a fourth-grade teacher in the town of North East, Pa., and one of

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the participants in the survey, said she fervently recycles bottles and cans, keeps the thermostat down and years ago added insulation to her all-electric home, cutting her energy bill in half. It saves money but also "it's doing the right thing for the environment. They go hand in hand," she said.

While she commutes 70 miles round-trip to work each day, she says mass transit or car pooling "is not an option. If it were, would I use it? Probably."

Like Meehl, 7 in 10 people surveyed said they thought adding energy-saving insulation in their homes would be a good idea for the environment. But only half said they were very likely to do it and 1 in 5 respondents would be highly unlikely to add insulation. In some cases, respondents said the structure of their house prevents more insulation from being added easily.

About 45 percent of those surveyed embraced the idea of gas-electric hybrid cars, but only 1 in 5 would be very likely to buy such a vehicle, and half said they were "not at all likely" to buy one.

"They're too expensive right now," said Vaughan Oliver, 65, of Mount Vernon, Ky. "You would have to have one for years and years and years to make it feasible to pay for itself." Oliver, interviewed as he drove his Jeep Cherokee down Interstate 65 south of Lexington, said he might consider a hybrid "in another 10 years," when he says he'll be more secure that one would not cause him a problem.

Today, gas-electric hybrids can carry a \$4,000 to \$7,000 or more price premium over similar gasoline-powered vehicles.

The poll also found:

- 72 percent were very likely to recycle cans and bottles.
- 63 percent were very likely to turn down thermostats.
- 62 percent were very likely to buy energy-efficient appliances.
- 59 percent were very likely to use cold water for clothes washing.
- 59 percent were very likely to buy recycled paper products.

More than half said it would help the environment if people brought their own shopping bags to stores, and 46 percent said they were very likely to do so, while 25 percent ruled it out.

NBC Universal's sponsorship of the poll was related to their "Green Is Universal" week of programming about environmental issues.

The poll was conducted Nov. 5-9 by GfK Roper Public Affairs and Media. It involved landline and cell phone interviews with 1,006 adults nationwide and has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points.

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