

Environmental Priorities Should Be Air and Water Pollution

Just under half of Americans have changed their lifestyle to become more environmentally sustainable

ROCHESTER, N.Y. & WASHINGTON--([BUSINESS WIRE](#))--As another Earth Day passes by, a majority of Americans say that they are paying attention to environmental issues, but only three in ten or less are paying a great deal of attention to these issues. Three in ten are paying a great deal of attention to air pollution (31%), water pollution (30%) and water shortages (29%) with one-quarter (25%) of Americans saying they pay a great deal of attention to combating global warming. Only two in ten adults say they pay a great deal of attention to the extinction of certain species (21%), deforestation (21%) and reducing Americans' carbon footprint (20%).

These are some of the results of a new **BBC World News America/The Harris Poll**[®] of 2,123 adults surveyed online between April 6 and 8, 2009.

Among these different environmental issues, some are higher priorities than others. When asked which two issues government officials should make their top priority, two in five adults say air pollution (42%) and water pollution (40%). One third say combating global warming (34%) and water shortages (34%) while lesser numbers say reducing Americans' carbon footprint (18%), deforestation (16%) and the extinction of certain species (11%) should be top priority.

Different regions have different environmental priorities. Due to recent droughts, a plurality of Westerners (44%) say water shortages should be the top priority for government officials to address. Almost half of Midwesterners (47%) believe air pollution should be a top priority as do 45% of Easterners.

Being Environmentally Sustainable

When being environmentally sustainable is defined as "taking from the earth only what it can provide indefinitely, thus leaving future generations as much as we have access to ourselves", just under half of Americans (48%) say they have done something to make their lifestyle more environmentally sustainable while one-quarter say they have not (27%) and are not sure (26%). Last year over half (53%) of Americans say they had made changes to their lifestyle to be more environmentally sustainable, while 25% had not and 22% were not sure. Again there are regional differences and those in the wet are more likely to say they have made changes (52%) while those in the East are less likely to say they made changes (44%).

When it comes to what changes people have made, certain things are done more than others to make one's life environmentally sustainable:

- More than four in five adults who have made changes are recycling (85%), a high number but down from 91% who said they were recycling last year;
- Seven in ten (71%) are paying bills online and/or receiving paperless statements, not very different from the 73% who said this last year;
- About half of those who are making changes are buying more locally produced food and/or goods (53%, up from 49% last year), bringing their own bags to stores (51% up from 39%) and buying green household products (50%, up from 47%);
- Under two in five people who have made changes are installing resource friendly appliances (39% down from 46% last year), buying more used products (37% up from 31% last year) and discontinuing purchases of plastic water bottles (37% up from 30%); and,
- Some other changes people have made are to compost (27% up from 23%), carpooling (14% down from 16%) and buying a hybrid car (5% up from 3%).

So What?

With the economy in turmoil, people may be making the more economical decisions, rather than those leading to a more environmentally sustainable life. This could be seen in the small drop in people who say they are making changes in their lifestyle. But as the economy improves, with the attention on things like bringing bags to stores and discontinuing the use of plastic water bottles, the number of people making these changes should be growing. It might also be that the little

everyday things people are doing are making a difference – but Americans don't think they are enough to say they are making lifestyle changes.

Methodology

This **BBC World News America/The Harris Poll**[®] was conducted online within the United States April 6 and 8, 2009 among 2,123 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. Full [data tables and methodology](#) are available www.harrisinteractive.com

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

About Harris Interactive

[Harris Interactive](#) is a global leader in custom market research. With a long and rich history in multimodal research, powered by our science and technology, we assist clients in achieving business results. Harris Interactive serves clients globally through our North American, European and Asian offices and a network of independent market research firms. For more information, please visit www.harrisinteractive.com.

About the BBC AMERICA

BBC AMERICA brings audiences a new generation of award-winning television featuring news with a uniquely global perspective, provocative dramas, razor-sharp comedies and life-changing makeovers. BBC AMERICA pushes the boundaries to deliver high quality, highly addictive and eminently watchable programming to viewers who demand more. BBC AMERICA is distributed by Discovery Networks. It is available on digital cable and satellite TV in more than 64 million homes. For up-to-the-minute information on BBC AMERICA, forthcoming U.S. premieres, art work and news from the channel, log on to www.press.bbcamerica.com.