

Household Energy Reduction Project

U n d e r s t a n d i n g b e h a v i o u r a l c h a n g e

Waterworks Valley Community
Climate Connect Project

The ten
'big picture'
barriers that
govern our
lives.

During the past year we've identified many 'barriers' that make it difficult for well-intentioned householders to reduce their energy and climate footprint. These include dozens of small things that get in the way.

For instance, we may choose not to ride a bike to work for safety reasons, or for status reasons. Or because we are just not fit enough. We may choose to eat lots of red meat because we like going to barbecues. We fly in jet planes more than we would like because that's part of our paid job.



These are all '**discrete**' barriers – in that they affect one particular behaviour. But there are other much bigger barriers that tend to stretch across all of our behaviours.

Now we've identified a list of ten '**big picture**' barriers that make it difficult for us to live more sustainably.

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The 10 'big picture' barriers that govern our lives

What's normal?

"Normal is getting dressed in clothes that you buy for work, driving through traffic in a car that you are still paying for in order to get to the job that you need so you can pay for the clothes, car, and the house that you leave empty all day in order to afford to live in it."

Ellen Goodman

1. Not enough time

'Time poverty' heads the list of reasons why people don't live sustainably. To live sustainably requires quality time: time to grow vegetables... time to walk kids to school.... time to make sustainable choices... time to just bend down and turn off a power point. The rush of modern life has created a time trap.



Remedies that work? For many it means a re-thinking of life's priorities. But there are other remedies too, like identifying one-off tasks (like insulating a ceiling or adjusting a thermostat) that will reduce your footprint into the future without having to tend to them each day of your life.

2. Too much money

Disposable income is the next big bogey – but it's not spoken about much. Once we earn enough for our basic needs, what do we spend our surplus wealth on? Well, mostly we decide to fly overseas, or renovate a house that maybe doesn't need renovating or buy things we don't really want.



Remedies that work? This one is closely linked to that of time poverty, above. Aside from shifting our life's priorities, the main remedy that works is keep a tab on your personal expenditures and choose wisely what you spend money on. Some expenditures cause a high footprint, others much less so.

3. Energy is too cheap

If the price of energy increased fourfold, we would no doubt use much less of it. Although many people complain about their power bills, for most households the energy price signal is not enough to compel people to use less energy, so we go on using much more than we need to.



Remedies that work? It's useful to tote up your combined energy usage and how much you can save and better ways you could spend that money. Also, be aware that energy prices are foreshadowed to go through the roof in the next few years, where we may be facing \$200 to fill a petrol tank!

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Who is responsible for climate change?

Is it corporations?

Is it governments?

Is it ordinary people, like you and me?

After all, climate change is caused by billions of decisions that are made each and every day by ordinary citizens.

How about 22 percent?

That's the mathematical figure recently derived by Grist magazine.

That makes us 22 percent responsible for the condition of our planet – government and business own the rest!

4. Disempowerment

"Little old me can't change the world, so what's the point doing anything?"

This is the same moral position taken by many political leaders who argue that we should not take a lead on climate change until the world was in step. The same moral dilemma applies to all of us at a personal level.

Remedies that work? Its very easy to feel disempowered when you don't have support around you. Joining an active group can be very empowering. The best way to understand the power of personal action is to look at history: the abolition of slavery was brought about by changes in personal behaviour which then led on to political resolution.



5. Intangible rewards

Electricity is invisible. Greenhouse gases are invisible. So, when we do things to reduce our climate footprint, as often as not we don't see any result from our actions – except maybe a small reduction in our power bill. This lack of reward for effort tends to take the wind out of our sails, so many people get discouraged.

Remedies that work? There are many ways to make your efforts much more visible. Try using metering devices and keeping a record of the effects of your actions. Sharing this information with others helps too. Getting an expert 'home assessment' is very worthwhile.



6. Consumer culture

While we are being urged to live more sustainably, billions of dollar are spent each day urging us to consume. Whether we like it or not, the society we share traps us in a this all-pervading consumer culture. Few of us are totally in control of our consumer habits.

Remedies that work? Crass consumerism is a major cause of unhappiness, ill health and stress. Many people who break free from this culture find that they are healthier, happier and live much more fulfilled lives. Being aware of our real 'needs' and 'wants' is a process of self-discovery.



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7. Technology fixation

"Emissions from fossil fuels are damaging... so ... just switch to renewable power, then all will be well?" Well, no. Fixing up bad technology is only a small part of the equation. Our non-sustainable culture has many, many faces – like our lifelong habits, the food we choose to eat, the size of our houses and the sheer volume of resources that are used to freight goods to us that we could produce ourselves.



Remedies that work? It is worth reminding ourselves that changing our light bulbs may be a good thing to do, but changing our heads and our cultural values leads to much greater change.

8. Social pressure

We all live within circles of people – our households, our families, our extended families, our workplaces, our schools. And in these environments there are patterns of living that everyone gets used to and pressure to conform – even when we see that some habits and behaviours are a good thing to break.



Remedies that work? When opportunities arise, take a stand. Do it tactfully, so as not to offend. Think of the 'multiplier effect'. By taking a stand we can empower many other citizens to take charge of their lives and reduce their climate footprint, thus multiplying our own efforts many times over.

9. Western individualism

We all like our 'things' and our 'space' and our nuclear homes. Individualism has its virtues, but taken to extremes it leads to gross wastage of resources and also causes much loneliness. To learn to live more sustainably and wholesomely we need to find ways to live more socially and cooperatively, to share our transport and space and the many things that we don't need to own ourselves.



Remedies that work? Breaking down selfish individualism is a gradual process of change. Sustainable communities strive to provide shared resources and skills and learning opportunities.



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10. Tyranny of distance

The human brain is wired to respond to immediate threats, but has great difficulty responding to long-term threats – like 20 years time. Although we know that climate change will cause catastrophic hardship within our own children's lifespans, that looming threat is not close enough to deserve our immediate attention. To our own peril we adopt a 'wait and see' attitude.

Remedies that work? We need to remind ourselves that for many thousands of victims – drought stricken farmers, cyclone victims, the people of Pacific islands – the future has already arrived. Our own 'future' may be just around the corner. Acting now may save us a lot of turmoil and trauma later on.



So... which of these affect you?

Like to find out? We've created a 5 minute self-assessment. Just [CLICK HERE](#) to fill it out.

We would very much like to learn more on this subject and your combined responses will help us to discover the key barriers that hold us back.

Our aim is to help find solutions that work.

