

Reducing household water use – which behaviours should be prioritised?

Industry Note Program A: Society Project A2.2

Households have the capacity to generate significant reductions in water use. There are many water-saving behaviours that households can adopt – but some have a greater impact on water use than others. Which household behaviours should demand-reduction campaigns prioritise?

Choosing behaviours for targeted interventions

Water-saving behaviours have been rated according to their impact on household water use, the likelihood of being adopted, and the opportunity for change. These behaviours were then used to create an Impact-Likelihood Matrix. Behaviours which save the most water (high impact behaviours), have the highest likelihood of adoption, and have the greatest opportunity for change can be identified (e.g. letting the lawn go brown, see Table below). This provides a 'roadmap for change' - a list of high-impact behaviours that can be prioritised in water demandreduction programs.

Target behaviours	 Let the lawn go brown during dry seasons or replace it with drought tolerant plants Flush the toilet less Water the garden in early morning and evening, and only if it needs it Use a low-flow shower head 	These behaviours have the highest impact on household water use, and high likelihood, with low existing uptake in the population. Consider promoting these behaviours in demand-reduction campaigns
\$ High impact behaviours, limited by cost	 Install greywater system Connect rain tank to bathroom and laundry Buy water-efficient, front-loading washing machine 	These behaviours have the highest impact on household water use, but with a low likelihood because of financial cost. High effort may also be a barrier for some of these behaviours. Consider promoting these behaviours when incentives are available
Easy behaviours that add up	 Fill the washing machine or dishwasher Avoid rinsing under a running tap – scrape plates Turn off taps when cleaning teeth or shaving Wash the car less 	These are easy behaviours. Individually, they have a low impact, but contribute to household water savings when combined with other behaviours. Consider promoting these behaviours as part of broader campaigns that aim to maintain behaviours, or foster water-saving identity and social norms.

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Developing the Impact-Likelihood Matrix

Measurements of impact and likelihood of water-saving behaviours are the core of the Impact-Likelihood Matrix, and, with "opportunity", form the basis of choosing behaviours for targeted interventions.

Impact: The amount of water saved by each behaviour has been quantified and ranked using scientific studies to form an 'Impact' score. High impact behaviours are those that save greater amounts of water (see full report for details).

Likelihood: The 'likelihood' data comes from a survey of Australian adults which identified the effort they thought it would take to perform certain behaviours. Three types of effort were rated: physical, mental and financial. For each behaviour, the highest rated effort was recorded. The likelihood score is the reverse ranked order of the items from most likely (lowest effort) to least likely (greatest effort).

Opportunity: 'Opportunity' is the percent of Australian households who have not yet taken up the behaviour. This data is taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the CRC for Water Sensitive Cities' national survey of Australians. The capacity to change behaviours is greatest for behaviours that have high opportunity.

The actual amount of water saved from adopting these behaviours may vary according to household and garden size, climate and other environmental conditions. The suitability of each behaviour may vary across settings. This matrix is intended to help you select which behaviours to prioritise in your particular area.

This research was conducted as part of Accelerating transitions to Water Sensitive Cities by influencing behaviour (Project A2.2).

This project focuses on household behaviour that affects water consumption, quality and runoff as an important part of the solution to the issues of drought, flooding, and pollution. Specifically, it seeks to address the issue that there are many ways in which householders can act to help address these challenges through the identification, prioritisation and ultimately influence of behaviours that assist in transitioning to greater water sensitivity.

Further reading

How influencing behaviours can accelerate the transition to a water sensitive city (http://goo.gl/H7m4W9)

Further information

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http://www.watersensitivecities.org.au Project website: http://goo.gl/Y2INhl

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