

2008 Behavior, Energy and Climate Change Conference Roundtable Abstract

4. The Challenge of Promoting Conservation: Why Aren't We Talking about Changing Consumption Behavior?

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Abstract: The largest share of the typical American's energy use and carbon footprint is embedded in the things we buy—not through direct energy consumption as many people assume. This tells us that we can only achieve the goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050 by first making more sustainable lifestyle choices, second through conservation and energy efficiency applied thoughtfully in our homes, businesses and fuel efficiency in driving, and third through alternative energy and alternative fuels. Call this the greenhouse gas reduction loading order.

The energy efficiency profession has spent the past 30 years avoiding talking about “lifestyle”—preferring instead to tell people they can have their cake and eat it too, through energy efficiency.

Questions that this roundtable will pose include:

- How can the energy efficiency community join together with other advocates for climate change action to send strong, consistent messages that “lifestyle matters in this fight and here is what you need to know about your choices as a consumer to make a difference”?
- Is it possible to transform the “keeping up with the Jones” paradigm into a preference to “keeping up with the Greens?”
- How do we avoid the fear of being the bearer of bad news?
- Can we not deliver this message in a manner that is consistent with the values of western democracy by emphasizing “wiser choices” rather than advocate for deprivation?
- What precedents exist where utilities and other energy efficiency advocates have successfully influenced lifestyle choices that impact energy use?