

# AMERICANS' ACTIONS TO CONSERVE ENERGY, REDUCE WASTE, AND LIMIT GLOBAL WARMING IN MAY 2011



Anthony Leiserowitz, PhD  
*Yale Project on Climate Change Communication*  
*School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University*

Edward Maibach, MPH, PhD  
*Center for Climate Change Communication*  
*Department of Communication, George Mason University*

Connie Roser-Renouf, PhD  
*Center for Climate Change Communication*  
*Department of Communication, George Mason University*

Nicholas Smith, PhD  
*Yale Project on Climate Change Communication*  
*School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University*



George Mason University  
Center for Climate Change Communication



George Mason University  
Center for Climate Change Communication

# Americans' Actions to Conserve Energy, Reduce Waste, and Limit Global Warming May 2011

Interview dates: April 23, 2011 – May 12, 2011

Interviews: 1,010 Adults (18+)

Margin of error: +/- 3 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

NOTE: All results show percentages among all respondents, unless otherwise labeled. Totals may occasionally sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

This study was conducted by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, and was funded by the Surdna Foundation, the 11th Hour Project, and the Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment.

## Principal Investigators:

Anthony Leiserowitz, PhD

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication

School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University

(203) 432-4865 [anthony.leiserowitz@yale.edu](mailto:anthony.leiserowitz@yale.edu)

Edward Maibach, MPH, PhD

Center for Climate Change Communication

Department of Communication, George Mason University

(703) 993-1587 [emaibach@gmu.edu](mailto:emaibach@gmu.edu)

Connie Roser-Renouf, PhD

Center for Climate Change Communication

Department of Communication, George Mason University

(707) 825-0601 [croserre@gmu.edu](mailto:croserre@gmu.edu)

Nicholas Smith, PhD

Yale Project on Climate Change Communication

School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale University

(203) 432-1208 [nicholas.smith@yale.edu](mailto:nicholas.smith@yale.edu)

Cite as: Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C. & Smith, N. (2011) *Americans' Actions to Conserve Energy, Reduce Waste, and Limit Global Warming: May 2011*. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication.

<http://environment.yale.edu/climate/files/BehaviorMay2011.pdf>

## Household Behaviors

Q1.<sup>1</sup> To start, we'd like to ask you some questions about some things you may be doing. How often do you do the following things?<sup>2</sup>

In the winter, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	26	34	33	38
Often	19	22	19	24
Sometimes	18	16	20	16
Rarely	11	10	10	8
Never	15	10	11	5
Not Applicable	10	7	8	9

Use<sup>3</sup> public transportation or carpool.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	6	6	4	9
Often	7	7	8	9
Sometimes	12	14	14	15
Rarely	20	19	18	19
Never	40	40	41	35
Not Applicable	14	14	16	13

Walk or bike, instead of driving.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	5	7	5	8
Often	10	14	11	11
Sometimes	18	20	24	20
Rarely	24	30	25	20
Never	33	24	27	31
Not Applicable	11	6	9	9

<sup>1</sup> Items are listed in the order they were asked despite occasional non-sequential item numbers. Items not shown in this report are being released separately.

<sup>2</sup> 2010 wording: How often do you do this now?

<sup>3</sup> 2010 wording: Take public transportation or carpool

Q1a. For each of the actions below, over the next 12 months, would you like to do this more frequently than you are now, less frequently than you are now, or about the same as you are now?<sup>4</sup>

In the winter, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	17	24	20	26
About the same	73	73	76	70
Less frequently	11	3	3	4

Use<sup>5</sup> public transportation or carpool.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	17	14	9	17
About the same	63	76	81	68
Less frequently	20	10	11	15

Walk or bike, instead of driving.

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	28	26	20	24
About the same	53	70	73	63
Less frequently	19	4	7	13

Q39. How many of the light bulbs in your home are energy-efficiency compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)?<sup>6</sup>

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
All	19	14	14	12
Most	34	38	33	28
Some	18	19	19	22
A few	14	16	16	16
None	11	10	15	18
Don't know	4	4	4	5

*People who said "some," "a few," or "none" on Q39 were asked the following question.*

<sup>4</sup> 2010 wording: In the coming year do you intend to do this less often, the same, or more often?

<sup>5</sup> 2010 wording: Take public transportation or carpool

<sup>6</sup> 2008 wording: How many of the light bulbs in your home are high energy-efficiency compact fluorescents (CFLs)?

Q40A. Over the next 12 months, how likely are you to change most of the light bulbs in your house to energy-efficiency compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)?<sup>7</sup>

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Yes, I'd like to and probably will	34	36	40	44
Yes, I'd like to but probably won't	30	26	26	26
No, I don't want to	22	17	22	17
I don't know	13	21	12	13
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>430</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>527</i>	<i>1,190</i>

Q51. Thinking about the energy-saving actions you're already taking and those you'd like to take over the next 12 months: If you did most of these things, how much do you think it would reduce your personal contribution to global warming?<sup>8</sup>

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	7	11	-	13
Some	26	27	-	35
A little	48	47	-	36
Not at all	20	16	-	16

Q52. If most people in the United States did these same actions, how much would it reduce global warming?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	26	31	-	42
Some	34	34	-	36
A little	28	27	-	14
Not at all	13	8	-	8

Q53. If most people in the modern industrialized countries around the world did these same actions, how much would it reduce global warming?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	39	46	-	60
Some	31	29	-	25
A little	20	18	-	9
Not at all	11	7	-	6

<sup>7</sup> 2008 wording: Which of the following best describes what you are likely to do over the next 12 months? Change most of the light bulbs in your home to high energy-efficiency compact fluorescents (CFLs)

<sup>8</sup> 2008 wording: Think back to the energy-saving actions you're already doing and those you'd like to do over the next 12 months: If you did most of these things, how much do you think it would reduce your personal contribution to global warming?

## Consumer Behavior

Q201. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you rewarded companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming by buying their products?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	8	5	4	5
Several times (4-5)	9	8	7	11
A few times (2-3)	22	15	17	22
Once	6	5	5	4
Never	56	67	68	58

Q202. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you punished companies that are opposing steps to reduce global warming by NOT buying their products?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	10	9	5	7
Several times (4-5)	6	6	7	8
A few times (2-3)	14	11	13	14
Once	4	4	3	3
Never	67	71	72	69

Q203. Over the next 12 months, would you like to punish companies that are opposing steps to reduce global warming by NOT buying their products...

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently than you are now?	35	35	32	40
About the same as you are now?	55	55	58	53
Less frequently than you are now?	10	10	10	7

Q204. Over the next 12 months do you intend to buy the products of companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming...

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently than you are now?	39	36	34	40
About the same as you are now?	54	55	58	56
Less frequently than you are now?	8	10	8	4

Proportion who intend to engage in consumer activism over the coming year.<sup>9</sup>

May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
55	51	51	58

## Citizen Behavior

Q206. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you volunteered with or donated money to an organization working to reduce global warming?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	1	1	1	1
Several times (4-5)	2	3	1	1
A few times (2-3)	7	5	5	4
Once	8	8	7	7
Never	82	84	87	87

Q207. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you posted a comment online in response to a news story or blog about global warming?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	2	1	1	-
Several times (4-5)	2	2	1	-
A few times (2-3)	5	5	4	-
Once	4	4	5	-
Never	88	89	89	-

Q208. Over the past 12 months, how many times have you written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials about global warming?<sup>10</sup>

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	1	1	1	1
Several times (4-5)	1	2	1	1
A few times (2-3)	4	4	5	3
Once	4	4	4	4
Never	90	89	88	92

<sup>9</sup> Includes all those who have rewarded and/or punished companies in the past year and plan to continue to do so about the same or more frequently, and all those who have never engaged in these actions, but intend to do so more frequently in the coming year.

<sup>10</sup> 2008 wording: Over the past 12 months, how many times have you written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming?

Respondents in 2010 and 2011 who had contacted government officials were asked the following question.

Q209. When you contacted a government official did you...

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Urge them to take action to reduce global warming?	77	71	72	-
Urge them to not take action to reduce global warming?	20	18	22	-
Other	3	11	7	-
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>104</i>	-

Q210. Over the next 12 months, would you like to volunteer with or donate money to an organization working to reduce global warming ...?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More often	17	13	12	16
About the same	64	69	64	68
Less often	20	18	24	16

Q211. Over the next 12 months, would you like to post a comment online in response to a news story or blog about global warming...?

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More often	10	8	10	-
About the same	68	72	67	-
Less often	22	19	24	-

Q212. Over the next 12 months, would you like to write letters, email, or phone government officials about global warming ...?<sup>11</sup>

	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More often	12	11	13	13
About the same	66	71	64	71
Less often	23	19	23	17

<sup>11</sup> 2008 wording: Over the next 12 months, would you like to write letters, email, or phone government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming...?



*Respondents who said they would like to contact their government officials the same or more often were asked the following question.*

If you were to contact government officials about global warming, would you:

	<b>May 2011</b>	<b>June 2010</b>	<b>Jan 2010</b>	<b>Nov 2008</b>
Urge them to take action to reduce global warming?	72	71	69	-
Urge them to not take action to reduce global warming?	15	14	19	-
Other	13	15	12	-
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>726</i>	<i>783</i>	<i>711</i>	<i>-</i>

## **Methodology**

These results come from nationally representative surveys of American adults, aged 18 and older. The samples were weighted to correspond with US Census Bureau parameters for the United States. The surveys were designed by Anthony Leiserowitz and Nicholas Smith of Yale University and Edward Maibach and Connie Roser-Renouf of George Mason University and conducted by Knowledge Networks, using an online research panel of American adults.

- May 2011: Fielded April 23 through May 12 with 1,010 American adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent, with 95 percent confidence.
- June 2010: Fielded May 14 through June 1 with 1,024 American adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent, with 95 percent confidence.
- January 2010: Fielded December 24, 2009 through January 3, 2010 with 1,001 American adults. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 3 percent, with 95 percent confidence.
- November 2008: Fielded October 7 through November 12 with 2,164 American adults. Data was collected in two waves: wave 1 from October 7 through October 20 and wave 2 from October 24 through November 12. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2 percent, with 95 percent confidence.