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People 'think they're alone' in wanting to save the planet

Eight out of 10 Canadians want tougher laws to protect environment

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Canadians care strongly about saving the planet but wrongly believe that many of their fellow citizens don't, according to survey findings to be released today.

They blame inadequate information and a lack of government leadership for their own failure to behave sustainably while assuming that others are not really concerned, said James Hoggan, a public relations expert.

"They think, 'Well, why should I be the chump who behaves in a more environmentally friendly manner when no one else is?' But that's because they have this mistaken view that people outside their circle of friends really don't care. That's actually not true."

The survey shows that more than eight in 10 Canadians believe the government should enact stricter laws and regulations to support a more sustainable economy that protects and manages the country's resources for future generations.

They also want taxes shifted to those who pollute and deplete natural resources, and double GST slapped on gas guzzlers to fund tax rebates for fuel-efficient vehicles.

The findings, to be presented today at the Globe 2006 environmental business fair in



CREDIT: Glenn Baglo, Vancouver Sun
Hydrogen may be the non-polluting power of the future, but it still won't get you from Whistler to Vancouver in time if traffic is heavy. Congestion was blamed Thursday for six fuel-cell vehicles showing up nearly two hours late at Globe 2006, a conference on the business of the environment being held at the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre. Two Honda FCX vehicles and a GMC pickup, Chevy pickup, Nissan SUV and Ford Focus Hybrid were returning from their inaugural run on the \$1.1-million BC Hydrogen Highway, a federally funded project to set up hydrogen filling stations between Vancouver International Airport and Whistler in time for the 2010 Olympics. The project is intended to pave the way for fuel-cell commercialization and a future hydrogen economy.

Vancouver, were characterized by Hoggan as both a wake-up call and a leadership opportunity for government and business.

He said advocates of sustainable business practices "are guilty of talking to themselves a lot" instead of reaching out to the public who drive public policy and consumer patterns.

"One of the key problems that we have in Canada is that Canadians do one thing and say another," Hoggan said in an interview. "Anybody who is trying to advocate sustainable behaviour should try to weave in the message that Canadians actually do care."

He said the survey demonstrates that the great majority of Canadians want the economy to be successful today while sustaining the country's environmental, economic and social resources for future generations.

Asked why Canadians don't behave more sustainably, 48 per cent blame government leadership first.

More than seven in 10 Canadians surveyed agree with the statement: "If everyone in the world lived the consumer lifestyle we enjoy in North America, we would destroy the planet."

Hoggan also said companies and organizations need to do a better job of explaining the term "sustainability," which is defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The survey is part of the Sustainability Research Initiative led by James Hoggan & Associates, a public relations agency extensively involved in environmental and sustainability issues, and the Globe Foundation, which promotes the \$1.1 trillion international business of the environment.

Sponsors include Canadian Pacific Railway, BC Hydro, the University of B.C., the David Suzuki Foundation, Vancouver-based Ethical Funds, Greater Vancouver Regional District, Concord Pacific, the Fraser Basin Council, Alcan and the Port of Vancouver.

The sustainability survey of 2,500 Canadians was conducted by McAllister Opinion Research of Vancouver in all provinces except Quebec. The findings are considered accurate within two percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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WHAT WE AGREE ON

Survey highlights:

- 92 per cent of Canadians agree Canada should phase in mandatory standards requiring all new buildings and appliances to deliver 50 per cent more energy efficiency in 10 years.
- 89 per cent approve of meeting 100 per cent of Canada's new electricity needs through conservation measures, or renewable clean energy.
- 84 per cent agree that we need stricter laws and regulations to protect the environment.
- 83 per cent agree Canada should reduce taxes on income, payroll and investment, and replace these with taxes on pollution and depletion of natural resources.
- 83 per cent want the government to set strict national sustainability targets and report back to Canadians regularly on progress.
- 82 per cent agree Canada should introduce laws to promote denser, walkable cities that would make public transit more practical and reduce traffic congestion. Some 71 per cent want the same laws to protect farmland and reduce the environmental impacts of urban sprawl.
- 79 per cent approve of tax rebates on fuel-efficient vehicles funded by double GST paid on gas guzzlers not used for commercial or industrial purposes.
- 67 per cent agree that Canadians consume more than our share of world resources.
- 64 per cent disagree that protecting the environment usually means sacrificing comfort and convenience.

Source: James Hoggan & Associates