

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND THE SHARING ECONOMY

Summary of Research Findings and Gap
Analysis

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Research Work Group

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Research Questions

- What is the state of knowledge about sustainable consumption and the sharing economy? How is this defined or framed? What are the emerging trends? What potential roles can municipal and state governments play?
- What barriers have been identified and how might these be overcome?
- What strategies, techniques and policies are effective at promoting sustainable consumption through reusing, renting, repairing, and sharing products and materials?
- What GHG reduction benefits can be achieved through these activities?
- What strategies, techniques, policies and innovative approaches have not yet been tried but have been proposed that are considered to have greatest potential?

Research Process

- Builds on 2012 research summary “Changing Consumer Behavior”
- Sources reviewed
 - ▣ Popular press
 - ▣ Peer-reviewed literature
 - ▣ Government- sponsored reports
- Focus on sustainable consumption activities and government actions to promote them

West Coast Forum Research Work Group Topic 3 – Changing Consumer Behavior

Summary of Research Findings and Gap Analysis

Topic 3: Changing consumer behavior

RESEARCH QUESTION(S)

- What strategies, techniques and policies are effective at changing the way consumers behave relative to materials management (including purchasing decisions as well as disposal choices) so as to be more sustainable? Measures could conceivably include GHG reductions, participation rates, tons of material avoided, sales volume of types of products, etc.)
- What strategies, techniques and policies and innovative approaches have not yet been tried but have been proposed that are considered to have greatest potential?
- Can the results of the various strategies, techniques and policies be compared or are there fundamental differences in the way they are measured across studies? If comparable, what is the comparison?
- How do the costs for these compare? What factors influence the cost and what strategies can be used to reduce the cost?
- Which have been more successful: mass-media approaches or focused, localized or “hands-on” groups
- Does behavior change more from increasing consumer costs (such as tipping or collection fees), from increasing convenience, or other factors?
- What are the barriers to more sustainable purchasing practices by individuals? How effective are various methods at overcoming those barriers?
- How can behavior change programs best prioritize behaviors and design programs so as to minimize negative rebound effects?
- How effective are green labeling approaches and certifications at changing behavior and how do they compare? Is the impact lessening as more labels and certifications come into existence?

The research findings on this topic are divided into two primary categories: 1) consumption – consumer behavior in the purchase and use of goods and 2) discard management – behavior associated with end of life disposition of the purchased goods.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS¹

General

The literature identifies a number of potential government interventions that might change consumer behavior, in addition to specific types of behaviors (by both consumers and producers) that might be targeted for change.

The literature addresses potential target behaviors such as:

- Extending the lifetime of goods in use, repair and reuse

¹ This research summary includes resources from a literature review compiled by ICF International for the Forum’s Research Work Group as well as resources in the Consumption *Metagography* developed for the Forum’s Consumption Work Group.

Concepts and terms

Sustainable consumption

“...the use of services and related products which respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resources and toxic materials as well as the emissions of waste and pollutants over the life-cycle so as not to jeopardise needs of future generations.” (Oslo Symposium on Sustainable Consumption, 1994)

- Improved material efficiency
- Reduced impacts
- Consuming less + consuming differently
 - ▣ renting, reusing, borrowing, repairing, buying durable goods, sharing, bartering

Sharing Economy

Sharing of products, services or information

- Shared use
- Idle or “slack” capacity
- Other dimensions
 - ▣ *Social or informal exchange*
 - ▣ *Fee for use*
 - ▣ *Technology platform*
- Short term rental vs. sharing
 - ▣ *Zipcar vs. Avis*
 - ▣ *Lyft vs. carpooling vs. taxi*



Key Findings

Drivers

- Advances in technology, internet
- Recent recession
- Changing attitudes about ownership
- New sense of community
- The green movement



Key Findings

Trends

- Changing ownership patterns
- Mixed results for reuse and repair
- New technology platforms

Impacts

- No systematic analysis of economic, equity and environmental impacts



Key Findings

Barriers

- Trust
- Legal and regulatory issues
- Limits: convenience, practicality and access



Opportunities

- New business models and revenue streams
- Increased use of technology platforms

Government Actions

- Remove legal and regulatory barriers
- Provide grants and assistance
- Provide information and recognition
- Reform zoning and permitting requirements
- Enhance government procurement policies



Information Needs

- Scale and scope of sustainable consumption activities
 - ▣ Consistent definitions and concepts
 - ▣ Measurement methods and relevant metrics
 - ▣ Opportunities for expansion
- Relationship to local economic development activities
- Comprehensive review of legal and regulatory barriers, tools
- Potential outreach strategies, pilot programs

Q & A

- Questions?
- Feedback?