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# *The Households and the Environment Survey*

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# Why?



- ***Policy-makers need to know where information gaps exists***
  - To better target public outreach and education campaigns
- ***General public has demonstrated a clear interest in this type of information***
  - Environmental data highly used by educators and in the social media
- ***Basic research questions:***
  - How might the actions of households impact the environment?
  - How have real or perceived changes in environmental conditions changed the actions of households?

# Some facts about the 2007 survey



- ***Geographies***
  - **National, 10 provinces and 33 Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs)**
    - Three Territories excluded
    - A CMA is an area consisting of one or more adjacent municipalities situated around a major urban core. To form a CMA, the urban core must have a population of at least 100,000
  - **Collection from October 2007 to February 2008**
  - **Computer-assisted telephone interview**

# Some facts about the 2007 survey



- *Telephone interviews of 21,690 responding households representing 12,932,350 Canadian households*
  - Respondent was proxy for household
  - 16 years or older with knowledge of household's environmental practices
- *Average length of interview was 27 minutes, including the entry and exit blocks*
- *Response rate >75%*

# HES content and use



- ***Gathers information from households across the country on their practices and behaviours regarding such topics as:***
  - Energy and water use and conservation
  - Waste management practices
  - Purchasing decisions
  - Factors contributing to indoor air quality
  - Transportation decisions
  
- ***The survey results contribute to the development of programs and policies at all levels of government that deal with issues such as:***
  - Climate change
  - Access to public transit
  - Air and water quality
  - Waste management issues

# Energy Use Supplement



- *All respondents to the core survey were mailed a detailed questionnaire on their dwelling's...*
  - Energy-using equipment
  - Characteristics that may impact the use of energy (e.g., insulation, types of windows)
  - Direct use of electricity, natural gas, heating oil and propane
    - Respondents given option of reporting information themselves or giving Statistics Canada the authority to contact their energy supplier to gather the information
    - Most chose to give us the authority
  - **50% response rate = ~11,000 completed surveys**

# Energy Use Supplement




- *Will release first data later in 2009*
  - Focussing on quantitative consumption by demographic factors at low levels of aggregation
  - Then linking quantitative consumption with equipment and practices while controlling for demographics
    - Necessarily higher level of geography

# Influencing public policy and debate



- *Extensive media coverage when data products are released*
- *A clear and persistent interest*
  - Data and media requests continue to be received even 4 months after the last release
- *Most sought after information:*
  - Bottle water usage
  - Waste management practices

# Influencing public policy and debate: bottled water



- *Re: drinking water - of the households with municipally-supplied water (86%)...*
  - 30% reported they used primarily bottled water
  - 59% reported they used primarily tap water
  - 10% reported couldn't decide which they used primarily
  - *The figures for non-municipal water supplies (13%) are virtually identical (30%, 61% and 7%, respectively)*
- *Much attention paid to these data – numbers first released in 2006 report*
  - Some levels of government instituting bottled water bans
  - Spurred ongoing public debate due to the fact that most areas of Canada have ready access to clean drinking water
  - These data are cited in this context

# Influencing public policy and debate: waste management



- *Some provinces performed “better” than others*
- *“Weak on recycling, more likely than most to guzzle bottled water and less than keen on energy-efficient lights: Manitoba’s environmental reputation took a beating” Winnipeg Free Press*
- *The province was under the national average for many variables*
  - Waste management practices were highlighted but bottled water consumption also noted
- *Provincial government under pressure to put more resources into recycling and composting*

# Influencing public policy and debate: radon awareness



- *Radon is an odourless, colourless radioactive gas that rises from the subsurface into dwellings*
- *HES data show that there is some lack of awareness of radon and its effects on human health*
- *The Canadian government is scheduled to launch a national awareness campaign*
- *2009 HES will ask respondents questions that will tell whether they are reporting an awareness of this gas or are mistaking it for something else, e.g., CO, VOCs*

# Comparisons with OECD survey data



- ***Sample size at national level theoretically allow comparisons***
  - **Though unit of observation is different**
- ***Modal differences (web-based versus telephone) may influence comparison***
  - **But literature and Statistics Canada's internal research not definitive**
- ***Current analyses of HES are not in line with those of the OECD***
  - **Different goals**
  - **Yet, some numbers can be compared... e.g., number of vehicles owned by households, use of water conservation equipment**
- ***Future comparative work will be carried out in the coming months***

# Environment / health linkages



- *In 2006, the Chief Statistician of Canada asked that an expert panel be assembled to look at how health and environment statistics can be better integrated.*
- *A series of meetings were held over the past three years*
- *Many suggestions were received*
  - **More questions on indoor and outdoor air quality**

# New for 2009 - health



- *In the last 12 months did you or someone in your household change their normal behaviours or practices due to concerns about poor air quality in your dwelling?*
- *What behaviours or activities were changed?*
  - Opened windows more often to increase air circulation
  - Used an air conditioner more frequently
  - Went outside/left the dwelling
  - Used an air cleaning system, such as a HEPA filter
  - Changed the filters in the furnace more often
  - Presence of mould or condensation

# New for 2009 - waste management

- *Leaving out recycling questions for 2009 cycle*
  - Will include them in 2011
- *But including special waste disposal questions*
  - Emerging issue – disposal of compact fluorescent light bulbs
- *Also re-introducing the composting “quantities” questions*
  - Asked in 2006 but not in 2007

# Lessons learned after two iterations



- ***“Buy-in” - engage a broad potential user group***
  - Eight other federal departments part of content advisory group
- ***Smaller geographies are what get people’s attention***
  - Many environmental policy and program decisions are made at the local level
- ***As with all analyses in the realm of social science, examine the context of the data***
  - Regional differences may not be attributable to “good” or “bad” environmental decisions but by other factors
    - Geography, climate, availability of programs or services



# **Thank-you!**

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