

# The Environmental Home Guard - Norway

OECD Experts Workshop,  
Paris 16-17 January 2001

## From words to action

By Dag Endal, Executive Director of the Environmental Home Guard

Early autumn 2001 a new and comprehensive programme will be launched by The Norwegian Environmental Home Guard (EHG) in cooperation with the Norwegian Ministry of Environment. The aim is to motivate and educate households to make environmentally friendly choices in their every-day lives.

Key word: *Empowerment*. Slogan: *From words to action*. Target group: “Early majority”, as well as “early adopters” within the adult population. Fields of action, among others: *resource saving, waste management, energy saving, transportation habits, household chemicals, shopping habits, food habits*.

The new programme is based on nine years of experience in The Environmental Home Guard, as well as impulses from contacts to similar organisations in a number of countries. The EHG is affiliated to the network of Global Action Plan International (GAP).

## The Norwegian setting

The Environmental Home Guard is based on many of the same principles as those found in "green-consumer" movements in a number of Western countries. The organizational set-up has, however, been adapted to a Norwegian context, which can be briefly characterized by the following points:

- Norway has many voluntary organizations involved in humanitarian, social and cultural issues
- Norwegian voluntary organizations traditionally join forces in issues of mutual interest.
- On the average, each Norwegian is a member of between 4 and 5 organizations. Norway has all the usual environmental organizations, and they tend to enjoy wide respect throughout society. However, they are small in membership, and the international movements, for example Greenpeace, do not – by far - have as many members in Norway as they have in many other countries.
- Many organizations are ideologically disposed to engage in environmental issues, without making it their main priority.
- The population density is low. Norway consists of many small communities, spread over a large geographical area. Voluntary work in clubs and in associations is a very important cultural factor in these local communities.
- Environmental awareness amongst the population is relatively high. Public-opinion polls show that many people believe that environmental problems are among the most

important and serious issues of our time. Many people say they would like to adopt more sustainable habits in their households.

- On the other hand; the public discussion and political agenda in Norway is dominated by the fact that Norway is a country “on top of the world”: A very high level of consumption, market orientation and a highly commercialised system, high purchasing power in very large segments of the population, surplus in the state finances, energy surplus and a correspondingly high energy consumption.

This is the background for the choice of organisation structure and working methods of the Environmental Home Guard.

## **The Environmental Home Guard**

The EHG is an attempt to combine the competence of the environmental movement in Norway with the vast networks of the traditional voluntary organizations. Sixteen of these organizations are formal partners of the project through their membership in the Advisory Committee of the EHG. Among these organizations are:

The Norwegian Horticulture Society, The Church of Norway, The Norwegian Association for Women and Families, The Norwegian Confederation of Sports, The Norwegian Tourists Association, The Norwegian Rural Women’s League, The Norwegian Association of Local Welfare Societies, The Norwegian Guide and Scout Association, Norwegian Peoples' Aid and The Norwegian Federation of Co-operative Housing Associations.

Two major environmental NGOs are also involved: The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature and The Future in Our Hands.

In total, the affiliated organisations have a membership of more than 3 millions.

The initiative for The Environmental Home Guard was taken in 1990 by The Norwegian Society for the Conservation of Nature (Norges Naturvernforbund) and The National Campaign for Environment and Development (Felleskampanjen for Miljø og Utvikling, now called ForUM). The project was officially launched in October 1991 in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. In its initial phase, the Home Guard has been funded by direct grants from the Ministry of Environment, but has been gradually moving towards other sources of funding. The Guard is serviced by a staff more than 20 persons, spread among 13 service bureaus in all parts of the country. Headquarters in Oslo.

There are currently more than 100,000 individual "participants" on the "rolls". Given the Guard's emphasis on family mobilization, the actual number of those involved is probably much higher. Additionally, a large number of schools, offices, kindergartens, churches, housing co-operatives, local municipalities etc. are involved in the EHG programmes.

## **To know your audience**

The role of The Environmental Home Guard is to provide households and individuals with the knowledge, competence and inspiration they need to adopt more sustainable consumption habits. To succeed in this effort, the EHG has to, maybe more than ordinary environmental NGOs, take into account the needs and preferences of the target population. “To learn to know our audience” has been an essential part of the development process leading up to the launching of a new programme next year. In this process we have studied and considered the following trends and theories, among others:

### **Changes in the NGO landscape**

The NGO landscape in Norway is changing. The level of voluntary work among the population is the same as before. But this work takes new forms and shapes, related to a change in general norms and values in Norway.

Traditional NGOs, often with a history of more than hundred years, have difficulties in recruiting new members and finding new types of activities. New types of organisation are popping up, often on an ad hoc basis and centred around more specific and limited topics and interests than the traditional NGOs.

### **Post-material values**

Norway has experienced the same shift in values and attitudes as many other Western countries, towards “post-material values” as the American sociologist Ronald Inglehart called them:

- From collective thinking towards more individuality
- Sensation seeking rather than search for safety and stability
- The traditional culture of moderation and sparseness is being replaced by a very dominating consumer culture
- Development of a multiplicity of attitudes and cultural expressions, rather than one dominating set of values
- Reduced confidence in traditional authorities, formal and informal
- Ad hoc involvement replacing long-term commitments

### **The Social Diffusion Theory**

We have studied a theory dividing a target population into five-six segments according to their receptiveness to new ideas and habits and a model for how new trends disseminate between the various segments.

### **The environment awareness in Norway**

We have also studied a range of opinion polls and research reports covering the various aspects of environmental awareness in the public opinion in Norway.

### **Time consumption and quality of life**

“Lack of time” is a problem felt by many Norwegians, leading to stress and reduced life quality. This topic seems to be a fruitful starting point for discussion and awareness raising, not only around families’ timetables, but also consumption habits more in general. We have studied research on lifestyles and Norwegian attitudes towards quality of life.

### **The Dream Society**

Furthermore we have studied a Danish book on the issue of marketing strategies for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: How to sell products in a market where all basic needs – and more than that – already are satisfied? Although this is the opposite purpose of our work, the book contains theories and techniques that are very fruitful in the development of new strategies for the marketing of a more sustainable lifestyle in the Western societies.

### **Empowerment strategies**

For many people, the move from words to action is more complicated than simply reading a pamphlet or collect facts on the environmental situation. To change habits is a process involving strong emotional elements, as well as social considerations and relations. Education and awareness strategies will fail if you only communicate to the brain and not the hearts of the target population. Through cooperation with The Global Action Plan International we

have had access to experiences from several countries where “empowerment techniques” have been used

### **Check list for program design**

The international GAP network has produced a checklist for designing good empowerment programs. The list is based on four basic psychological needs: Territory, Membership, Change, Meaning. Programme qualities are then derived from these basic needs.

## **Information strategies**

The material mentioned in the preceding chapters has led to an information strategy with the following elements, among others:

- Focus on single practical actions rather than a complete lifestyle change (a step-by-step strategy);
- An optimistic approach, pointing towards solutions and better alternatives rather than stressing the sheer magnitude of environmental problems and all the difficulties we face in solving them;
- To find a place and a role for everyone, in particular for those who do not feel they have a high level of expertise or motivation;
- Focus on action rather than ideology;
- To combine environmental awareness with the search for improved quality of life; to combine ecological benefits with social improvements;
- To visualise that “many roads may lead to Rome”; different types of families with different attitudes and habits may all contribute to a more sustainable development;
- Our task is to help people to “produce their identity”. By choosing habits, products and attitudes individuals create their “image”.
- Opening up for individuals to choose and define their own level of commitment, what kind of information they need and in which form they prefer to have the information;
- Networking and building of alliances; find individuals and organizations that can carry the message to the relevant target groups with a high degree of credibility;
- Offer activities and tasks with a limited time perspective;
- To choose an oral, written and visual language that is different from the traditional “NGO language” and also different from the “environment vocabulary”;
- A touch of humour, both in personal contacts and information materials;
- The integration of cultural activities and modes of expressions in informational programmes; theatre, music, lyrics etc.
- The establishing of personal relations with the target population. When participants contact the EHG, they should be met by individuals, not impersonal bureaucrats.

A number of these points have been part of the EHG strategy already from the start, others have been added as a result of the ongoing development process towards new methods.

## **Environment Goals**

The activities of the Environmental Home Guard (EHG) aim to achieve the following important environmental goals:

- A reduction in the use of natural resources
- Reduced use of environmentally harmful substances
- Lower energy consumption
- Reduced production of waste
- Protection of bio-diversity

To achieve its goals, the EHG focuses on two major types of change:

- A general reduction in the level of consumption
- Changes in consumption patterns towards more environmentally friendly alternatives

## **Components of the new programme**

The ambition of the Environmental Home Guard is to launch a comprehensive programme, where the combination of many elements gives the target population the possibility to choose according to their needs and preferences:

- What kind of information and other types of support they need
- What topics are relevant for them
- To find the information at the time they need it
- Which information channel they prefer to use
- Their level of involvement in activities and social settings
- Their level of ambition and commitment
- Activities and information that is relevant for their family situation here and now

The following programme elements are now under development, each of them with specific functions within the totality:

### **The Eco Pledge**

A declaration of intent, whereby households can “sign up” for a few actions; their small contribution to the solution of the environmental problems. Households will then be followed up over years by mail, e-mail and personal contact to develop their knowledge, their actions and their identity as green consumers.

#### *Function:*

- To collect as many names/individuals as possible; persons who say they are willing to receive information and other follow-up from the EHG
- To introduce these persons to other programmes with stronger impact on their behaviour
- To give individuals the opportunity to link up to an environmental network with a low ideological profile and with a low level of commitment

#### *Working methods:*

- Distribution of the invitation via printed material and Internet to a broad segment of the population
- Local recruitment campaigns, often in cooperation with local authorities (Local Agenda 21), community organisations, local companies, schools, kindergartens, housing cooperatives, churches etc. In such campaigns we normally recruit from 10-30% of the target population.

### **The Eco Step**

A six-step programme for individual households. By monthly mailings the households are given activities to perform: To register their habits and go for improvements. Households will be given a “green certificate” at the end of the programme.

*Function:*

- To give households a material with working methods, whereby they systematically can monitor their behaviour and change towards more sustainable habits.
- To send regular reminders to the households
- To help households to change habits, without involving them in meetings and social groups and settings.
- A programme where households can decide their own level of ambition and implement changes at a speed they decide themselves.
- 

*Working methods:*

- The tasks for the households will be sent them by mail or e-mail, shortly after they have signed up for the Eco Pledge. Households continue with the programme as long as they wish.

**The Eco Team**

Groups of 5-8 households, meeting 6-8 times, to help and encourage each other to develop more sustainable habits. Discussions are based on registration of habits in the households before each meeting. These notes and numbers form the basis for discussions in the Team: Which are the differences between the households? How can the differences be explained? Exchange of experiences and information among the team members.

In-depth programme for a visible minority, with team support augmented by coaching. The EcoTeam concept has been developed by Global Action Plan International and is now being used in more than ten countries.

*Function:*

- To give households energy and inspiration through interaction with other families.
- To disseminate environmental information from household to household in a local community, as a supplement to top-down information strategies
- To build local networks between “green families” in order to augment the effects of actions taken by the individual households.
- To create networks that can raise issues towards local shops, companies, local authorities etc.

*Working methods:*

- Interested persons establish and run their own teams, with support from the EHG in the form of working material, coaching etc.
- Local campaigns where the EHG, together with other partners, start a number of teams in a neighbourhood, local community, village etc.

**The Eco Guide**

An Internet based guide (data base) to more sustainable solutions in households, answering the following: WHAT can I do? HOW can I do it? WHY should I do it? Links to other web sites for more information. Other services: Test your green score, Hitchhikers meeting point (organized co-travelling by car), news bulletin on GMO food, list of green alternatives in individual municipalities etc.

*Function:*

- To make environmental information (what can you do in your household?) easy accessible for households at any time of the day or the year.

- To collect basic information for households in one single web-site, with links to sites with more in-depth information
- To give households the opportunity to find information relevant to their specific needs

*Working methods:*

- To produce facts sheets and background material on the most important aspects of sustainable consumption
- To collect questions from households, develop answers and continuously load new fact sheets and background articles into the database
- To link up with other partners to increase the number of visitors to the web site
- To produce Internet-based campaigns on specific issues (product boycotts, demands towards authorities etc)

### **The Eco Phone**

A national green number, where you can ask questions about households, consumption and environment.

*Function:*

- To channel all requests we receive from the public in one national telephone number, and thereby keep up a high standard on our services
- To give more time for our regional offices to do outreach activities, rather than office services

*Working methods:*

- To give eco-counselling to people who prefer “someone to talk to” rather than picking of information from printed material, Internet etc.
- The counselling given over the phone, will be based on the information collected in the Eco Guide

### **Eco Manuals**

Printed manuals for how to improve the environment profile of various types of institutions and target groups: “The Green Office”, “The Green School”, “Green housing cooperatives”, “Green Sports Clubs”, “Green kindergartens” etc.

Furthermore, households are offered manuals on home compost, gardening without chemicals, sustainable and healthy solutions in baby-care etc.

*Function:*

- To give ideas as to how specific groups and institutions can adapt “green thinking” to their own settings

*Working methods:*

- Distribution of the material to the relevant groups and institutions, often in cooperation with national organisations or umbrella structures for the respective groups (The Church of Norway, The Federation of Norwegian Cooperative Housing and Building Associations etc).
- Seminars and training courses for staff and elected officers in these groups and institutions
- Campaigns on the material, e.g. “Green Housing Cooperatives”.

## **Eco Counsellors**

Thirteen regional service centres, giving eco counselling services to households, voluntary organizations, schools, local authorities etc. These offices are involved in Local Agenda 21 activities towards the same target groups.

### *Function:*

- To organise awareness raising activities in their respective regions.
- To channel a maximum of our resources into local work, as close to the target groups as possible
- To assist individuals and groups who are willing to involve in activities for more sustainable consumption habits

### *Working methods:*

- To organise and to contribute to seminars, training courses, conferences etc on sustainable consumption
- To organise campaigns in cooperation with local authorities, community groups, NGOs etc.
- To give training and counselling to regional and local NGOs
- To stimulate Local Agenda 21 activities in communities and NGOs

## **Eco Context Programmes**

Local communities of Norway will be invited to use the above mentioned methods and material – as a “tool-box” for making campaigns towards households, in particular as part of their Local Agenda 21 work. The EHG will open up for production of local versions of the material, where involved partners also can be profiled.

Recruitment strategies will be developed and recruitment activities carried out in a joint effort by local partners (authorities, NGOs, companies, schools etc). Follow-up activities both by the Environmental Home Guard and local partners.

## **Strategies for change – and our contributions**

A change towards a more sustainable development in Norway will require a number of very fundamental changes in values, priorities, policies and structures in our society. This means that a very broad strategy, with many different elements, has to be applied. Such a strategy would include, among other things, the following elements:

- A shift towards “green taxation” and other economic measures;
- Legislation to regulate production, distribution and sale of products and services, as well as influencing consumer habits;
- “Direct actions”, boycott campaigns etc in specific issues;
- Research programmes on various aspects of a sustainable development;
- Product development ( for example Factor 4/10 strategies);
- Greening of businesses of all kinds;
- Education in schools on all levels;
- Information campaigns towards the general public, as well as towards specific segments of the population, professions etc;
- Campaigns using “consumer power”.

We see the work of the Environmental Home Guard as part of such a broad strategy and, consequently, base our work on a division of labour with authorities and other NGOs. We will only succeed in our efforts if other actors also succeed in theirs. And the other way around: Our work to raise awareness and educate and activate individuals will increase the effects of

measures taken by authorities and the business community. More than that, the necessary fundamental changes that our society has to undergo, will only be possible with broad support from the public. In other words, we believe in complementary action instead of competition and struggle for “one single truth” among environmentalists.

This thinking is also the reason for involving many different NGOs in the EHG activities. Some of these organisations may use their wide networks to distribute information to groups we normally would not have access to, other organisations can do the lobby work towards authorities and industry that the EHG is not able to follow up.

## **Government funding**

Already from the start, the Environmental Home Guard has had close contact with the Ministry of Environment, in particular, but also the Ministry of Consumer Affairs. In its initial phase the EHG received 100% funding from the Ministry of Environment. This has been gradually reduced, and the grant from the Ministry now covers around 50-55% of the annual budget of NOK 13.000.000.

## **Contact address:**

Miljøheimevernet (The Environmental Home Guard)  
P.O. Box 2113 Grünerløkka  
0505 Oslo  
Norway  
Tel. + 47 22 04 46 70  
Fax + 47 22 71 77 85  
E-mail: dag.endal@miljohv.no