

Save the environment? What's the point

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AUSTRALIANS are in love with cars, leave electric appliances on standby, don't like drinking the tap water and can't see that much point in saving the environment.

The latest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development comparison of the environmental behaviour of households in 10 member nations puts Australia at or near the bottom on most questions asked.

Entitled *Greening Household Behaviour*, the survey excludes the US and Britain but includes countries similar to Australia such as Canada and France as well as less similar nations such as Mexico and South Korea.

When it comes to concern, Australians are among the most worried. Between 40 and 50 per cent of Australians are "very concerned" about a range of issues from waste generation to air pollution to climate change. By contrast in the least concerned nations, the Netherlands and Norway, the ratings are between 20 and 30 per cent.

But Australians are relatively unprepared to believe we can do anything about it. Almost 5 per cent think there's no point in taking action as an individual or a household, more than in any nation surveyed, and twice the 2.5 per cent in Canada and 2 per cent in Mexico.

In homes Australians use more water than anyone apart from Canadians. Australians buy homes paying the least amount of attention to energy costs, with only 20 per cent making such calculations compared to 30 per cent of Italians and 50 per cent of Czechs.

Australians are most likely to leave appliances on in standby mode and are among of the least likely to turn down the heat. But Australians are most likely to recognise an energy efficiency label, but are middle of the range when it comes to installing energy efficient products.

Australian recycling services are among the world's best, but residents are the least likely of the nations surveyed to recycle household plastic, paper and glass and the second-least likely to recycle metal. When it comes to hazardous waste Australians are the least likely to dispose of batteries properly and the second-least likely to dispose of medicines properly.

The OECD finds that Australians are among the least satisfied with tap water of the 10 nations surveyed (only Mexico and South Korea think less of their water) but also are among the least ready to reach for the bottle. An extraordinary 88 per cent of Canadians drink bottled water compared to 30 per cent of Australians.

And Australians adore our cars, with 2.6 per family, beaten only by Italy, which has 2.7. Some 85 per cent of Australians use cars to get to shops, more than anyone else.