



## To Fight Climate Change, Don't Mention It, Study Suggests

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By: John Roach

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Shhh! Widespread adoption of energy-efficient technologies such as compact fluorescent light bulbs and electric cars promises to curb the pace of global climate change. But if widespread adoption is the goal, don't mention the environmental benefits, a new paper suggests.

"There is likely to be a significantly sized group that may not like these environmental messages," Dena Gromet, a researcher at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and the paper's lead author, told NBC News.

While not specifically addressed in the new paper, she added that "other messages might have more universal appeal that can be emphasized" when promoting energy efficiency such as greater energy independence and long-term financial savings.

Those who show a distaste for the environmental messages tend to side with conservative political ideologies, according to the paper, which teases apart how political views affect attitudes and choices when it comes to energy-efficient products.

"As expected, the more conservative participants were, the less they favored investing in energy-efficient technology," Gromet and colleagues write in the paper published online Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The ideological divide was strongest when energy efficiency was tied to the environmental message of reducing carbon emissions. Energy efficiency is more broadly appealing for the financial savings it offers and for increasing energy independence.

The negative impact of environmental messaging became apparent when 210 study participants were given \$2 to go light bulb shopping. When energy efficient, but more costly, compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs) were sold with a sticker that read "Protect the Environment," conservatives shied away from them.

When the more expensive CFLs were sold without environmental messaging — but touted the fact that CFLs last 9,000 hours longer than the less expensive incandescent bulbs and reduce energy costs by 75 percent — more conservatives bought them.

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When both bulbs were priced the same — 50 cents — all but one participant bought the more energy-efficient bulb, regardless of the content of the label, indicating that people across party lines give the biggest weight to economic value, the researchers note.

Environmental messages may be unnecessary to sell the energy-efficient technologies to liberals, according to the paper. These consumers may already "spontaneously" associate energy-efficient options with environmental benefits and "do not need a label to call the benefits to their attention."

"When liberals are buying a CFL, they are already thinking about how this is a good choice because it is going to benefit the environment," Gromet explained. "Whereas our research suggests it may not be

as top-of-mind for more conservative individuals."

This pattern of environmentalism and its association with the left-leaning side of the political spectrum has also been noted in survey data collected by Edward Maibach, who directs the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University.

"Conservatives are as likely as liberals to take a range of energy-saving actions, such as buying fuel efficient cars and energy-efficient appliances, but they are less likely to take certain energy-saving actions that are symbolically associated with environmentalism, such as installing CFLs," he told NBC News in an email.

That said, the center's most recent survey released April 2 found that 52 percent of Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents think climate change is happening and 62 percent said America should address it.

"The most conservative Republicans, however, remain unconvinced and are not interested in seeing America respond," he said. "My guess is that it is mostly very conservative Republicans who are turned off by environmental messaging associated with energy-saving products."

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