

## Are There Differences in Pro-Environmental Behaviour between Rural and Urban Canada?

Many past studies have found higher levels of engagement in pro-environmental behaviour (PEB) amongst urban respondents. The Environment Theme of the NRE project set out to discover whether urban residents really do practice more pro-environmental behaviours, or whether those results were a function of the questions asked. We mailed a survey to 5000 Canadians in ten provinces and have summarised the results from the 1660 respondents (35% response rate). In order to talk about different types of pro-environmental behaviour, we reduced

fifteen behaviour items into three categories: private-sphere PEB (consumer/individual behaviour, such as turning out lights, purchasing goods with less packaging), public-sphere PEB (writing letters to newspapers, calling or writing politicians, attending protests or rallies), and conservation sphere PEB (gardening, improving habitat, planting trees, composting). Not only did we fail to find urban respondents out-performing rural respondents, in both the private sphere and the conservation sphere, rural residents demonstrate higher levels of PEB.

We constructed the survey instrument carefully with an attempt to balance the normal suite of pro-environmental behaviours usually asked in this type of survey with some that may be more available to rural residents. For example, in past studies, higher levels of PEB among urban residents was likely due to questions such as, "Do you recycle?", and "Do you use mass transit." Many of these activities require infrastructure or opportunities that are not available to rural people. Our list of behaviour items included many of these traditional questions, but added some pro-environmental behavioural items that are available in rural settings.

Despite the greater adoption of private and conservation PEB items in rural Canada, Canadians as a whole engage in much more private and conservation PEB than public PEB. The average level of public PEB for Canada is less than one item (out of a



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possible five items), while the average for private sphere is over five (out of six) and for nature is almost three (out of four). While the exact items performed differ between rural and urban areas, the overall number varies little.

An analysis of the infrastructure available in rural and urban Canada revealed a significantly lower level of services and infrastructure that support PEB in rural areas. While public transit is available in 100% of urban areas, only 10 percent of rural respondents have access to a transit system. In addition, pick-up recycling is available to 90% of the urban respondents sampled, while in the rural residences, only 60% of respondents have access to the same service.

In communities where the existing transit or recycling services are



poor, residents should lobby their municipal and provincial governments for better service.

Alternatively, they could provide incentives for things like carpooling or other behaviours that are more feasible in rural places. Areas that lack services and infrastructure that support PEB could organize efforts to develop transit, recycling, or other programs. Currently, the federal government does subsidize tree planting for carbon sequestration. This is a good example of government sponsored program that would allow rural residents to also contribute to the environment through conservation-based PEB.

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