

americans' actions to conserve energy, reduce waste, and limit global warming in march 2012



Anthony Leiserowitz, PhD
Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University

Edward Maibach, MPH, PhD
Center for Climate Change Communication
Department of Communication, George Mason University

Connie Roser-Renouf, PhD
Center for Climate Change Communication
Department of Communication, George Mason University

Nicholas Smith, PhD
Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University

Jay D. Hmielowski, PhD
Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University



4C

George Mason University
Center for Climate Change Communication



George Mason University
Center for Climate Change Communication

Americans' Actions to Conserve Energy, Reduce Waste, and Limit Global Warming in March 2012

Interview dates: March 12, 2012 – March 30, 2012. Interviews: 1,008 Adults (18+)

Margin of error: +/- 3 percentage points, on average, at the 95% confidence level.

NOTE: All results show percentages among all respondents, unless otherwise labeled. Totals may occasionally sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

This study was conducted by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, and was funded by the Surdna Foundation, the 11th Hour Project, the Grantham Foundation for the Protection of the Environment, and the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation.

Principal Investigators:

Anthony Leiserowitz, PhD
Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University
(203) 432-4865 anthony.leiserowitz@yale.edu

Edward Maibach, MPH, PhD
Center for Climate Change Communication
Department of Communication, George Mason University
(703) 993-1587 emaibach@gmu.edu

Connie Roser-Renouf, PhD
Center for Climate Change Communication
Department of Communication, George Mason University
(707) 825-0601 croserre@gmu.edu

Jay D. Hmielowski, PhD
Yale Project on Climate Change Communication
School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, Yale University
(203) 432-0773 jay.hmielowski@yale.edu

Cite as: Leiserowitz, A., Maibach, E., Roser-Renouf, C., & Hmielowski, J. D. (2012) *Americans' Actions to Conserve Energy, Reduce Waste, and Limit Global Warming: March 2012*. Yale University and George Mason University. New Haven, CT: Yale Project on Climate Change Communication. <http://environment.yale.edu/files/Behavior-March-2012.pdf>

Executive Summary

We conducted a nationally representative survey (n = 1,008) to assess public climate change understanding, risk perceptions, policy support, and climate and energy-related behaviors from March 12, 2012 – March 30, 2012. This report describes Americans' actions to conserve energy, reduce waste, and limit global warming drawing on this and our prior surveys. A few highlights:

- In the past year, more than half of Americans (56 percent) say they have attempted to reduce their family's energy consumption.
- However, fewer than half (43 percent) of Americans report they often or always set the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler in the winter, a 5-point decline since November 2011.
- 21 percent of Americans say they sometimes, often or always use public transportation or carpool, and 30 percent say they walk or bike instead of driving, an 11- and 5-point decline, respectively, since November 2011.
- One in three (33 percent) Americans say that in the past year they rewarded companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming by buying their products.
- Over the next 12 months, 52 percent of Americans intend to reward or punish companies for their global warming-related behaviors by either buying or boycotting their products.
- 15 percent of Americans say they have volunteered or donated money to an organization working to reduce global warming. One in ten Americans (11 percent) has written a letter, email, or phoned a government official about global warming. Of these, 77 percent urged officials to take action, while 19 percent urged them not to take action to reduce global warming.
- In the past year, more Americans report that they increased vs. decreased their attention to global warming stories in the news (28% more vs. 19% less).
- By contrast, fewer Americans say that in the past year they talked about global warming with people they know (18% more vs. 27% less), searched for global warming information on the internet (11% more vs. 35% less), or shared global warming information on social networks sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, or other social network programs) (6% more vs. 41% less).

Household Behaviors

How often do you do the following things?¹

In the winter, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	23	23	26	34	33	38
Often	20	25	19	22	19	24
Sometimes	16	20	18	16	20	16
Rarely	15	12	11	10	10	8
Never	18	13	15	10	11	5
Not Applicable	7	7	10	7	8	9

Use² public transportation or carpool.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	5	7	6	6	4	9
Often	5	9	7	7	8	9
Sometimes	11	16	12	14	14	15
Rarely	19	20	20	19	18	19
Never	47	36	40	40	41	35
Not Applicable	12	12	14	14	16	13

Walk or bike, instead of driving.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Always	3	4	5	7	5	8
Often	8	9	10	14	11	11
Sometimes	19	22	18	20	24	20
Rarely	23	24	24	30	25	20
Never	38	32	33	24	27	31
Not Applicable	9	9	11	6	9	9

¹ 2010 wording: How often do you do this now?

² 2010 wording: Take public transportation or carpool

For each of the actions below, over the next 12 months, would you like to do this more frequently than you are now, less frequently than you are now, or about the same as you are now?³

In the winter, set the thermostat to 68 degrees or cooler.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	15	18	17	24	20	26
About the same	73	72	73	73	76	70
Less frequently	12	10	11	3	3	4

Use⁴ public transportation or carpool.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	15	14	17	14	9	17
About the same	60	68	63	76	81	68
Less frequently	25	18	20	10	11	15

Walk or bike, instead of driving.

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently	23	20	28	26	20	24
About the same	57	65	53	70	73	63
Less frequently	20	15	19	4	7	13

How many of the light bulbs in your home are energy-efficiency compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)?⁵

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
All	19	19	19	14	14	12
Most	34	36	34	38	33	28
Some	21	21	18	19	19	22
A few	14	13	14	16	16	16
None	9	8	11	10	15	18
Don't know	3	4	4	4	4	5

³ 2010 wording: In the coming year do you intend to do this less often, the same, or more often?

⁴ 2010 wording: Take public transportation or carpool

⁵ 2008 wording: How many of the light bulbs in your home are high energy-efficiency compact fluorescents (CFLs)?

People who said “some,” “a few,” or “none” in the prior question were asked the following question.

Over the next 12 months, how likely are you to change most of the light bulbs in your house to energy-efficiency compact fluorescent lights (CFLs)?⁶

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Yes, I'd like to and probably will	29	33	34	36	40	44
Yes, I'd like to but probably won't	22	23	30	26	26	26
No, I don't want to	27	24	22	17	22	17
I don't know	22	20	13	21	12	13
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>435</i>	<i>413</i>	<i>430</i>	<i>489</i>	<i>527</i>	<i>1,190</i>

Thinking about the energy-saving actions you're already taking and those you'd like to take over the next 12 months: If you did most of these things, how much do you think it would reduce your personal contribution to global warming?⁷

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	8	8	7	11	-	13
Some	29	24	26	27	-	35
A little	42	50	48	47	-	36
Not at all	21	18	20	16	-	16

If most people in the United States did these same actions, how much would it reduce global warming?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	23	24	26	31	-	42
Some	37	34	34	34	-	36
A little	26	33	28	27	-	14
Not at all	13	9	13	8	-	8

If most people in the modern industrialized countries around the world did these same actions, how much would it reduce global warming?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
A lot	38	42	39	46	-	60
Some	33	30	31	29	-	25
A little	19	21	20	18	-	9
Not at all	10	6	11	7	-	6

⁶ 2008 wording: Which of the following best describes what you are likely to do over the next 12 months? Change most of the light bulbs in your home to high energy-efficiency compact fluorescents (CFLs)

⁷ 2008 wording: Think back to the energy-saving actions you're already doing and those you'd like to do over the next 12 months: If you did most of these things, how much do you think it would reduce your personal contribution to global warming?

Consumer Behavior

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you rewarded companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming by buying their products?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	7	7	6	4	3	4
Several times (4-5)	8	9	7	6	5	9
A few times (2-3)	13	15	17	12	14	17
Once	5	4	5	4	4	3
Never	49	42	44	51	53	47
Don't know	18	24	21	23	22	20

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you punished companies that are opposing steps to reduce global warming by NOT buying their products?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	8	8	8	7	4	5
Several times (4-5)	5	5	5	4	6	6
A few times (2-3)	10	12	11	8	10	11
Once	5	4	3	3	2	3
Never	55	47	53	54	56	54
Don't know	17	25	21	24	23	22

Over the next 12 months, would you like to punish companies that are opposing steps to reduce global warming by NOT buying their products...

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently than you are now?	36	37	35	35	32	40
About the same as you are now?	56	55	55	55	58	53
Less frequently than you are now?	9	9	10	10	10	7

Over the next 12 months do you intend to buy the products of companies that are taking steps to reduce global warming...

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More frequently than you are now?	35	36	39	36	34	40
About the same as you are now?	58	55	54	55	58	56
Less frequently than you are now?	8	9	8	10	8	4

Proportion who intend to engage in consumer activism over the coming year.⁸

March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
52	55	55	51	51	58

⁸ Includes all those who have rewarded and/or punished companies in the past year and plan to continue to do so about the same or more frequently, and all those who have never engaged in these actions, but intend to do so more frequently in the coming year.

Citizen Behavior

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you volunteered with or donated money to an organization working to reduce global warming?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Many times (6+)	1	1	1	1	1	1
Several times (4-5)	2	3	2	3	1	1
A few times (2-3)	7	8	7	4	4	4
Once	5	5	7	8	6	7
Never	80	73	77	78	80	85
Don't know	5	10	6	7	8	3

Over the past 12 months, how many times have you written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials about global warming?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008 ⁹
Many times (6+)	1	1	1	0	1	1
Several times (4-5)	1	2	1	2	1	1
A few times (2-3)	5	6	4	4	5	3
Once	4	3	4	4	4	3
Never	87	80	86	84	83	89
Don't know	3	8	4	5	6	3

Respondents in 2010, 2011, and 2012 who had contacted government officials were asked the following question.

When you contacted a government official did you...

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Urge them to take action to reduce global warming?	77	76	77	71	72	-
Urge them to not take action to reduce global warming?	19	20	20	18	22	-
Other	4	4	3	11	7	-
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>102</i>	<i>118</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>104</i>	<i>-</i>

Over the next 12 months, would you like to volunteer with or donate money to an organization working to reduce global warming ...?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More often	14	13	17	13	12	16
About the same	64	68	64	69	64	68
Less often	22	19	20	18	24	16

⁹ 2008 wording: Over the past 12 months, how many times have you written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming?

Over the next 12 months, would you like to write letters, email, or phone government officials about global warming ...?¹⁰

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
More often	14	10	12	11	13	13
About the same	62	69	66	71	64	71
Less often	24	21	23	19	23	17

Respondents who said they would like to contact their government officials the same or more often were asked the following question.

If you were to contact government officials about global warming, would you:

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Urge them to take action to reduce global warming?	78	76	72	71	69	-
Urge them to not take action to reduce global warming?	10	11	15	14	19	-
Other	13	14	13	15	12	-
<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>736</i>	<i>741</i>	<i>726</i>	<i>783</i>	<i>711</i>	<i>-</i>

If people who share my views on global warming work together, we can influence the decisions of our elected representatives.

	March 2012
Strongly agree	19
Somewhat agree	43
Somewhat disagree	14
Strongly disagree	7
Don't know	18

I am willing to join a campaign to convince elected officials to do the right thing about global warming?

	March 2012
Strongly agree	9
Somewhat agree	28
Somewhat disagree	18
Strongly disagree	21
Don't know	25

¹⁰ 2008 wording: Over the next 12 months, would you like to write letters, email, or phone government officials to urge them to take action to reduce global warming...?

How much attention do you pay to information about global warming?

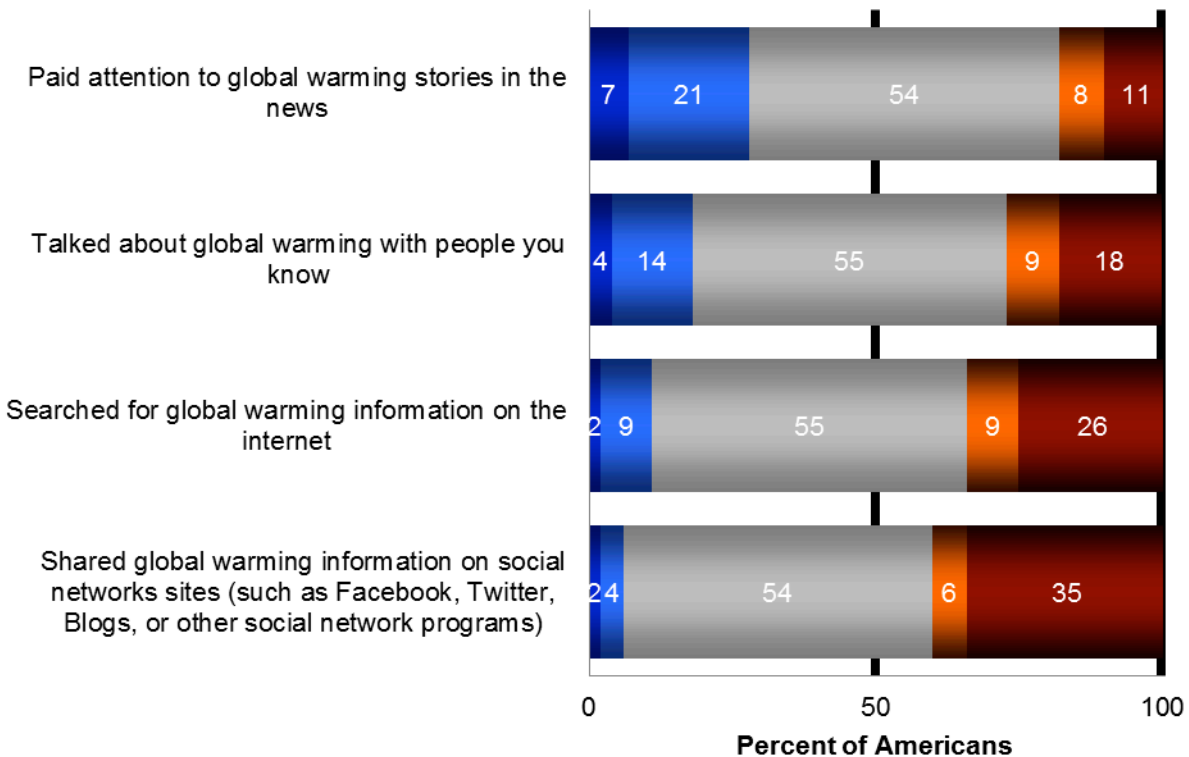
March 2012	
A lot	14
Some	33
A little	38
None	15

How much attention do you pay to information about conserving energy?

March 2012	
A lot	25
Some	41
A little	27
None	7

In the past year, have you done each of the following more often, less often, or about the same?

- Much More often ■ Somewhat more often ■ About the same
- Somewhat less often ■ Much Less often



In the past year, have you done each of the following more often, less often, or about the same?

Paid attention to global warming stories in the news.

	March 2012
Much more often	7
Somewhat more often	21
About the same	54
Somewhat less often	8
Much less often	11

Searched for global warming information on the internet.

	March 2012
Much more often	2
Somewhat more often	9
About the same	55
Somewhat less often	9
Much less often	26

Shared global warming information on social networks sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Blogs, or other social network programs).

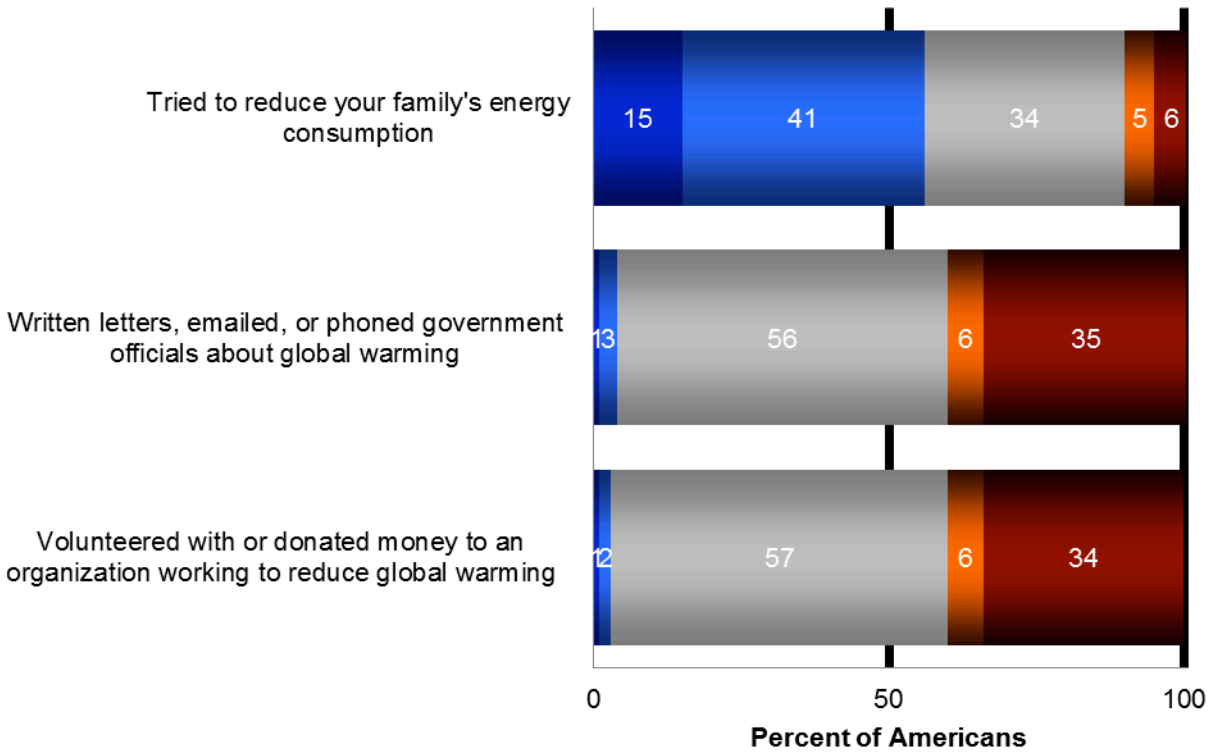
	March 2012
Much more often	2
Somewhat more often	4
About the same	54
Somewhat less often	6
Much less often	35

Talked about global warming with people you know.

	March 2012
Much more often	4
Somewhat more often	14
About the same	55
Somewhat less often	9
Much less often	18

In the past year, have you done each of the following more often, less often, or about the same?

■ Much More often
 ■ Somewhat more often
 ■ About the same
■ Somewhat less often
 ■ Much Less often



Tried to reduce your family's energy consumption.

March 2012	
Much more often	15
Somewhat more often	41
About the same	34
Somewhat less often	5
Much less often	6

Written letters, emailed, or phoned government officials about global warming.

March 2012	
Much more often	1
Somewhat more often	3
About the same	56
Somewhat less often	6
Much Less often	35

Volunteered with or donated money to an organization working to reduce global warming.

	March 2012
Much more often	1
Somewhat more often	2
About the same	57
Somewhat less often	6
Much less often	34

How often do you discuss global warming with your family and friends?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
Very Often	5	4	4	5	6	5
Occasionally	24	27	26	30	29	36
Rarely	41	40	42	39	35	33
Never	30	30	28	25	30	27

How many of your friends share your views on global warming?

	March 2012	Nov 2011	May 2011	June 2010	Jan 2010	Nov 2008
All	4	2	4	4	3	4
Most	25	24	25	23	23	24
Some	27	29	29	33	29	30
A Few	27	27	27	27	29	24
None	18	19	15	13	16	18

Methodology

These results come from nationally representative surveys of American adults, aged 18 and older. The samples were weighted to match key demographics (e.g., age, sex, region, education, etc.) based on data from the most recent Current Population Survey. The surveys were designed by Anthony Leiserowitz of Yale University, Edward Maibach and Connie Roser-Renouf of George Mason University, and conducted by Knowledge Networks, using an online research panel of American adults.

- March 2012: Fielded March 12 through March 30, 2012 with 1,008 American adults. The margin of sampling error is, on average, plus or minus 3 percentage points, with 95 percent confidence.
- November 2011: Fielded October 20 through November 16 with 1,000 American adults. The margin of sampling error is, on average, plus or minus 3 points, with 95 percent confidence.
- May 2011: Fielded April 23 through May 12 with 1,010 American adults. The margin of sampling error is, on average, plus or minus 3 points, with 95 percent confidence.
- June 2010: Fielded May 14 through June 1 with 1,024 American adults. The margin of sampling error is, on average, plus or minus 3 points, with 95 percent confidence.
- January 2010: Fielded December 24, 2009 through January 3, 2010 with 1,001 American adults. The margin of sampling error is, on average, plus or minus 3 points, with 95 percent confidence.
- November 2008: Fielded October 7 through November 12 with 2,164 American adults. Data were collected in two waves: wave 1 from October 7 through October 20 and wave 2 from October 24 through November 12. The margin of sampling error, on average, is plus or minus 2 points, with 95 percent confidence.