

www.ecosmagazine.com

Published: 4 May 2011

Global energy savings begin at home

Ben Johnson

As a child, Everald Garner fell in love with Tasmania's wilderness. But since the 1970s, when she first became aware of development impacts, she has been – by her own admission – something of an environmental 'stirrer'. Now living in Nowra, NSW, the 79-year-old retiree is hosting a series of meetings with friends, family and neighbours as part of the CSIRO's and Department of Climate Change and Energy's Energymark program.



Credit: Damien Quinnell

After an intensive recruitment drive that garnered national media attention, the project is now unfolding around kitchen tables across NSW.

Energymark has come a long way since its original trial in Newcastle three years ago. Three hundred convenors have now signed up to host nine other people in eight discussions of CSIRO-compiled material, which includes information on the links between climate change and energy generation, new and existing technologies, and more sustainable practices.

CSIRO Research Group Leader Ms Peta Ashworth developed the concept with CSIRO scientist Ms Anne-Maree Dowd. Ms Ashworth believes the NSW response augurs well for a national roll out.

'Energymark has the potential to reduce 3.8 tonnes of carbon per participant,' she says. 'For the NSW program alone, that is a potential reduction of 11 400 tonnes, the equivalent of taking 2600 cars off the road.'

The Newcastle trial participants slashed both their power bills and their carbon footprints – making Energymark an easy sell to new participants.

‘When we trialled Energymark with 171 people in Newcastle, participants saw their household electricity consumption drop by up to 37 per cent, and a reduction in individual carbon emissions of 27 per cent,’ says Energymark national program manager, Ms Yasmin van Kasteren.

Drawing on that experience, in which those who attended the 90-minute meetings ultimately spread some of their insights to an average of 34 non-participants, Energymark’s statewide campaign stands to reach about 88 000 people.

‘We’ve found that Energymark empowers participants to drive lasting change at home, by removing barriers such as uncertainty, lack of information and mistrust, and by changing attitudes and providing support and encouragement to change,’ says Ms Ashworth.

‘At the end of the Energymark process, participants are more informed and engaged as citizens. They have an energy and momentum that often leads them to stay informed, continue their change and become involved in local issues.

‘CSIRO’s emphasis on embedding research and evaluation processes into the program sets Energymark apart from other similar programs. The questionnaires included in Energymark inform CSIRO’s national research into climate change, as well as helping inform policy.’

Energymark convenor Dr Diana Choquette lives in Mosman. She says average families can save at least \$500 a year on bills, and that in the past quarter, she herself cut \$76 off her electricity bill.

For example, by using a clothes dryer for eight minutes before hanging out clothes, Dr Choquette estimates she saves \$275 annually on dryer use, and another \$100 on ironing. Tight-fitting blinds and double-glazed windows add a further \$400 of savings a year.

IT project manager Mr Damien Quinnell, 33, convenes two Energymark groups – one at home and another at work. The Bachelor of Sustainability student has given five or six addresses as part of Al Gore’s The Climate Project, but says Energymark allows him more time to get the message across.

‘You can see participants getting results as they work progressively through the eight sessions and the work book,’ he says.

Ms Garner draws parallels between the Energymark program’s grassroots approach and her past career in health promotion at the Department of Health.

‘It’s about prevention, trying to get in before disaster strikes,’ she says. ‘I’m a great believer in grassroots measures – it’s slowish, but you just have to be prepared for that.’

More information

Energymark: www.csiro.au/science/Energymark.html

From ECOS online <http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?paper=EC10099>