

Reduce carbon footprint or find more energy sources? Americans want to do both, poll finds

August 11 2008

(PhysOrg.com) -- With gas prices topping \$4 a gallon and the prospect of record-high heating costs this winter, Americans say they're driving less and cutting their electricity use to save money and improve the environment.

But they also support increased oil drilling and building nuclear power plants, according to a Stanford University/ABC News/Planet Green poll released Saturday.

Seventy-one percent of those surveyed said they are taking steps to reduce their so-called carbon footprint, and most think global warming can be reduced only if people make major changes. But 64 percent said it's more important to find new energy sources than to improve conservation.

"People recognize that driving less is not going to add up to a solution all by itself," said Jon Krosnick, a professor of communication and political science at Stanford. "What's more important to them is finding other energy sources that don't just require cutbacks."

Krosnick, who designed the poll with ABC News, is a senior fellow at Stanford's Woods Institute for the Environment and also holds the Frederic O. Glover Professorship in Humanities and Social Sciences. He has conducted similar polls during the past two years that show

widespread support for alternative energy, such as solar and wind power. His most recent telephone survey, conducted July 23-28, found that 44 percent of respondents said they favor building nuclear power plants.

The poll of 1,000 randomly selected people has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

Of those trying to curb their energy use, 60 percent said they changed their energy consumption by using less electricity and water and rigging their lights with compact fluorescent bulbs. Fifty-nine percent said they are keeping their cars off the road by carpooling, walking, biking and scaling back travel plans.

More than 70 percent of the total surveyed said recent hikes in gas prices have caused them financial hardship.

But the search for new energy sources is a top priority even for those who are conserving.

When a random half of respondents were asked if offshore oil drilling should be allowed in areas that are currently restricted, 63 percent said yes. Another 55 percent of that group said oil drilling should be permitted in wilderness areas that are now off limits.

"I think these are understandable reactions in trying to deal with energy and environmental issues," Krosnick said. "Just because Americans want more drilling doesn't mean they want irresponsible drilling. People often think optimistically about such things."

The poll also measured attitudes about global warming and steps the government and businesses could take to curb pollution.

When a random half of the poll participants were asked, most said they

like the idea of stricter fuel efficiency standards for cars and increasing taxes on profits earned by oil companies.

Sixty-eight percent of all respondents said the United States should take action on global warming even if other countries like India and China do less about the issue.

Nearly 60 percent approve of a "cap and trade" system that would let the government issue permits limiting the amount of greenhouse gases companies can emit while allowing companies to sell the permits to each other.

The poll shows a decline in the percentage of people who think global warming has been happening during the past century. Last year, 84 percent said they thought the world's temperature was on the rise. That figure dropped to 80 percent this year. And 61 percent think the federal government should do more about global warming, down from 70 percent who were asked the same question last year.

Krosnick said the slip in those responses appears to be tied to their perceptions of weather patterns in areas where they live.

"People are saying the weather is less variable now than it was a year ago, and this has led some people to become more skeptical about the existence of global warming and humans' role in causing it," he said.

ABC News poll analysis:

abcnews.go.com/PollingUnit/story?id=5525064&page=1

Provided by Stanford University

Citation: Reduce carbon footprint or find more energy sources? Americans want to do both, poll finds (2008, August 11) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-08-carbon-footprint-energy-sources-americans.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.