

# Psychology could hold the key to tackling climate change

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It is widely understood by scientists that in order to tackle climate change a revolution in individual behaviour needs to happen.

Given that policy has to date achieved only a limited success, the UK

government and a network of scientists have suggested that a phenomenon known as the 'spillover effect' might be a cost-effective way of slowing down [climate change](#).

Funded by a €1.5M grant from the European Research Council, Dr Lorraine Whitmarsh from the University's School of Psychology will for the next five years lead an international team tasked with providing evidence to support this theory.

"We want to test whether taking up a new green behaviour - such as recycling - can spill over to other green behaviours, such as taking your own bags shopping, and if so, under what circumstances," she said.

"Most people are willing to make only very small changes to their lifestyle, so we need to find ways of encouraging green behaviour which can match the scale of the [climate change challenge](#).

"The [spillover effect](#) has already shown to be effective in spheres such as seat-belt use and other safety behaviours, and we hope that it will show similar levels of success in encouraging environmentally-friendly behaviour.

"If so, it could also help to address other societal problems such as obesity and crime that rely on changing behaviour," she added.

The project will build on ongoing research conducted by the School of Psychology on [behaviour change](#) and green lifestyles, and will determine whether - and when - spillover can be achieved in this context.

"We are interested in testing whether different types of interventions to create behavioural spillover will be needed in different cultures, as well as whether spillover effects are more likely to happen between similar categories of behaviour such as turning off unused lights and turning

down the thermostat," said Dr Whitmarsh.

"This is the first cross-cultural study of green lifestyles and spillover. If we find spillover is easy to achieve, this is likely to be a really cost-effective method for helping address climate change", she concluded.

Provided by Cardiff University

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