

What's your eco-attitude?

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Academics at the University of Derby are using the virtual reality platform Second Life to gauge people's unconscious attitudes towards 'green' issues such as recycling.

Derby academics Simon Bignell (Psychology) and Rosemary Horry (Environmental Management) have created an 'Eco House' setting in Second Life where volunteers will be asked to take part in exercises which challenge their attitudes and beliefs towards environmental issues.

The pair have secured funding from the Higher Education Academy to run the Education for Sustainable Development project which will offer online tutorials and problem-based tasks for students to complete this academic year.

Using 3D virtual avatars and buildings, the project will help to highlight the motivational and behavioural factors that affect sustainability in areas such as recycling and [energy efficiency](#).

Study participants' avatars will enter the Eco House in groups, where the avatars will complete the tasks. The house features [wind turbines](#), allotments, refuse and recycling areas and energy meters in each room.

Tasks include:

- Finding out which avatar has used the most water in the household and why
- Deciding if using the microwave is more energy efficient than the oven
- Trying to determine why one particular avatar is not recycling materials.

Simon said: "Second Life is an excellent platform for psychologists in particular, to assess people's attitudes and beliefs to different issues.

"Some people for example, say they recycle material but actually they don't, and we hope this technology can help discover what the barriers to change are."

The team will analyse the findings next year to see if there are any patterns in the research data for wider publication.

The Derby Telegraph has launched a 10:10 carbon reduction campaign to help encourage people in the city to reduce their [carbon footprint](#).

As part of the campaign reporter Ed Hill was assigned his own avatar and tried out the Eco House in Second Life with Mr Bignell's own avatar Milton Broome. Simon previously developed a family house in [Second Life](#) featuring 'intelligent avatars' which replicated the social interactions

and symptoms of people with psychological conditions. He has also worked on projects to see how people with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome use virtual worlds to overcome communication difficulties.

More information: For more details about the project visit: www.previewpsych.org . Read more about the 10:10 campaign in the Derby Telegraph at: www.thisisderbyshire.co.uk/featuresandsupplements.html

Provided by University of Derby

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