

Living a greener life

This family followed easy tips to reduce their impact on the environment. The advice helped them save money, too

Romy Warren and Mark Jones live in Fareham with Romy's four children. They want to live a more environmentally-friendly life for different reasons. Romy's thoughts are about making a difference for future generations, while Mark's motivation is closer to home: he would like to see how it can benefit the family and save money. They have a tight budget, so any changes have to be practical and affordable.

At the start of the makeover, Romy was concerned that the family wouldn't be able to achieve much more than they currently do. They recycle, walk when they can, and they've got two low-energy light bulbs. 'Barriers for us include time, money and effort. For example, driving comes ahead of walking to save time, low-energy light bulbs cost more, and using the tumble drier takes less effort,' she says.

The family filled in a questionnaire about transport, waste, and energy and water use. The questionnaire was from Global Action Plan, an organisation that helps people to take practical environmental action. Global Action Plan then evaluated the questionnaire to work out how green the family were.

They scored 43 per cent – lower than the national average of 58 per cent. Their reliance on cars was one reason for this: Mark needs his company car at work, and they use the car at home to ferry the children around on time. They scored better on energy and waste, as they live in a modern house and have kerbside recycling collections.

For three months, the family received an Action at Home pack from Global Action Plan, which contained practical guidance on becoming greener.

1 ENERGY

The family's modern house has energy-efficient features like double glazing and loft insulation. They use the heating infrequently, but can forget to turn it off as they don't use the timer. They dry most of the washing with a tumble drier.

Global Action Plan's energy pack had tips on how to help cut global warming and save money on fuel bills by reducing energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. The tips were divided up by cost. Romy felt that they had made most progress with no-cost actions. For instance, they've started to turn off the television and computer rather than leaving them on stand-by, and switch off lights when rooms are empty. Mark now puts lids on pans when he's cooking, and they have found the boiler instructions and now use the timer. They've also checked the thermostat

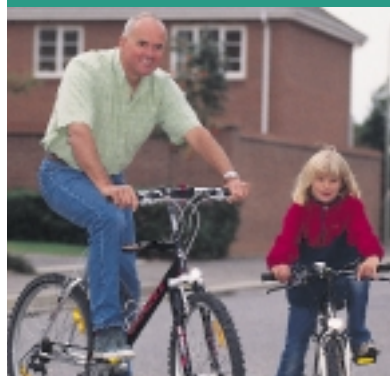
to ensure the heating's not set too high, and Romy has started to hang out washing to dry naturally. No-cost activities such as these could save the family £40 a year.

The family have done several things that cost less than £10, including switching to rechargeable batteries, and buying low-energy light bulbs for more rooms. Each low-energy light bulb can save £10 a year.

2 TRANSPORT

Mark does a lot of business miles in his company car, and takes the children to school. Romy is about to start a new job and was planning to drive to work. Global Action Plan's transport pack has tips on reducing pollutants from cars and find other ways to travel. However, like many people, the family found it difficult to alter the way they travel. They checked out public transport but found it expensive. Having said this, the pack made them realise the full cost of running a car.

The family followed advice from the pack, such as inflating tyres to the right pressure, and turning off the engine if stationary for two minutes or more. At work, Mark's trying to maximise the number of visits he does in each area to cut down mileage. Romy will try to cycle to her new job, and, where possible, the whole family will use their bikes for shopping and leisure activities.





'We want to live in a more environmentally-friendly way, but without extra costs and inconvenience'

3 WASTE

The family use a kerbside scheme that recycles paper, cardboard, cans and plastic containers, but not foil or glass.

Incinerating rubbish or storing it on landfill sites can cause pollution. The waste pack from Global Action Plan has advice on reducing, reusing and recycling household waste. To reduce waste, Romy has been buying fruit and vegetables loose, as they have less packaging (and are cheaper, too). She finds that multi-packs of small bags of crisps and chocolate biscuits have several layers of packaging. Romy has encouraged the children to cook biscuits for packed lunches, which has saved money, reduced wrappings and been healthier.

'Buying fewer packaged products and thinking about packaging and health has cut our bills,' says Romy. She's saved time, too: by keeping space in the freezer for bread and milk for the week, they can



visit the supermarket less often.

The family sent a card to the Mailing Preference Service to remove their names from mailing lists. This has cut the amount of direct mail they receive. They're also trying out labels designed for reusing envelopes, and they take unwanted goods to charity shops.

Romy ensures that she takes some bags with her when she goes shopping so that she doesn't need to use supermarket

carrier bags. Using string bags, for instance, instead of 12 carrier bags a week saves about 600kg of carbon dioxide a year. This is equivalent to the amount emitted by Mark's car over four weeks.

Mark takes glass for recycling to the bottle bank and he plans to buy a compost bin. The only local facility for recycling foil is inconvenient, but Romy's bought a reusable baking sheet to cut down on the amount of foil she uses.

THE FAMILY'S VIEW

After three months of using the action packs, the family filled in another questionnaire to get their final green score. The changes they made increased their score from 43 per cent to 69 per cent.

They made the greatest improvement in energy saving, though they did manage to increase their transport score just by planning their journeys and following other easy tips. 'The monthly packs jolt you into action – but without making you feel guilty,' says Romy. 'The packs cost £12 in total, and they should easily pay for themselves. The tasks come in bite-sized



pieces, and the family activities are good. We found the energy pack best – it's the one where you save most money.'

Mark is equally enthusiastic: 'I'm now much more interested. The packs involve a gradual change; I've always used the bottle bank, but the packs have made me think about other ways to go green.'

If you'd like to take part in Action at Home, call Global Action Plan on 020 7405 5633 or visit its web site (www.globalactionplan.org). For £12 you'll get your own green scores, and receive five monthly packs with ideas about reducing your rubbish, a new way to shop, greener transport, and saving water and energy.