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California Department of Water Resources
Division of Integrated Regional Water Management
Financial Assistance Branch
Post Office Box 942836
Sacramento, CA 94236-0001
Attn: Craig Cross

Subject: Water-Energy Grant Program Draft Funding Recommendations

Dear Mr. Cross,

I'm writing to offer my support of behavior-based messaging as a valid water and energy conservation program. I am an independent consultant specializing in water and energy efficiency. Recently I completed a draft report for the California Urban Water Conservation Council (CUWCC) reviewing customer water use messaging as a potential Best Management Practice for water conservation. With my research and development of this comprehensive review and analysis on behavioral messaging, I am well aware of the potential of behavior-based water and energy conservation programs.

In addition to my review of behavioral water use messaging for the CUWCC, I am also working with Southern California Edison on implementation of behavior-based energy efficiency programs. The energy utilities have been utilizing behavior-based efficiency programs since 2008 and are mandated by the California Public Utilities Commission to include behavior-based programs in their suite of residential efficiency programs.

While water and energy utilities have historically relied on financial incentives and information dissemination to help customers conserve resources, these actions alone are not enough to motivate consumers to change behaviors. In my experience, social norms messaging programs offer promising ways to affect and reduce resource use among consumers, especially when customers are shown their energy or water use in comparison to their closest neighbors. In addition, studies suggest the persistence of savings effects is long-term for social norms messaging that include social comparisons. This is attributed to consumers developing lasting habits from the behavioral changes made in response to the water or energy messaging.

Behavior based efficiency programs recognize and try to account for the difficulties consumers have translating intention into action. Consumers do not always know or cannot identify the best action that may lead to the highest returns and this leads to failures in decision-making, inaction or low returns for their perceived "high" efforts.

Customer water use messaging with a social norm component represents an opportunity for water purveyors to provide information to customers that helps them recognize if their use is in line with the average water use for similar households. Recognizing that people want to do what is “normal” these behavioral nudges can be effective in reducing water use. For these reasons I urge DWR to consider water behavioral messaging as an effective and plausible tool for achieving water and water-energy related conservation. In particular I recommend the behavior-based program proposed by UC Davis Center for Water-Energy Efficiency be eligible to be ranked and compete in the Water-Energy Grant Program.

Sincerely,

Nola Hastings

Nola Hastings
Hastings & Company, Inc.