

# research in brief

## **Energy Expos' Impact**

Many who have tried to evaluate large public events such as mall shows, farm expos, or fairs are understandably frustrated by: (1) poor participation rates to on-the-spot questionnaires or reaction cards and (2) a gnawing sense of possible bias when raffle registrations or address lists from information sign-up sheets are used to select a sample for follow-up contact. A University of Florida team came up with an interesting way to evaluate the impact of Extension energy expos conducted at three different sites in Florida.

As people were leaving the expo facility, interviewers randomly approached and asked participants about their reasons for attending, their perceptions of the educational value of the event, and permission to contact families six months later. The

follow-up method was a mailed questionnaire. Response rates of from 84% to 91% were achieved with the initial questionnaire and 2 additional mailed reminders. This method would have been enough to document the effects of the expo on participants. But, in addition, a comparison group was formed to estimate behavior change in the general population.

A control group randomly selected from telephone directories in the same communities was also surveyed by mail (response rates of 61% to 74%). The data received included an individual's perceptions of the seriousness of the energy situation and steps taken in the past six months to reduce energy consumption. Based on comparisons between the participants and nonparticipants (control), during the six months following the expo, more participants took actions to conserve energy than nonparticipants.

The question concerning the seriousness of the energy problem tried to determine if people who attend such events are different from those who don't. Obviously, something motivates people to attend! But, at least statistically speaking, others who didn't attend were equally concerned about the energy situation. The expo could be viewed as a timely input, providing alternatives and perhaps reinforcement so that homeowners did take action.

This method of securing data and providing a comparison strengthens the credibility of the conclusion that "the energy expos were a contributing factor in an individual's decision to make energy conserving changes."

"Evaluating the Impact of Public Expositions on Energy Conservation: Evaluation Report." M. F. Smith and others. Gainesville: University of Florida, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences, June, 1981.

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