

[News and events home](#)[News](#)[Events](#)[Featured research](#)[University Magazine](#)[For the media](#)

Resource efficiency 'secret weapon' in meeting climate change targets

Posted on 4 November 2009

The first research into how resource efficiency can help the UK meet its climate change targets is published today.

Commissioned by WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) and conducted by the Stockholm Environment Institute in the Department of Biology at the University of York, it shows that making better use of our natural resources could contribute as much as 10 per cent of the target reduction in UK domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

The research, which was launched at WRAP's Annual Conference in London, covers UK domestic emissions and those related to our consumption of goods and services imported from abroad.

In terms of consumer emissions (including imports), resource efficiency could reduce these by 8 per cent by 2050, and it can achieve this with no negative impact on UK GDP.

Until now, much of the discussion around how we meet these climate change targets has focussed on changing the way we produce energy. The research has shown how resource efficiency provides a much broader scope and presents the opportunity for immediate action.

The research looked at potential ways of increasing resource efficiency in the production and consumption of goods and services.

For production, the ideas included: lightweighting, using different and less environmentally damaging materials, using less materials to achieve the same result, building sustainably (such as with recovered materials) and making best use of our existing infrastructure, rather than building something new.

For consumption, the strategies suggested were: using goods to the end of their life, changing our diets and reducing food waste, renting instead of buying some products (eg high end clothing), and taking goods to be refurbished. The total UK household expenditure in 2004 was £732 billion, but £143 billion was spent on goods that householders could have used for longer.

If householders used those goods to the end of their life, instead of throwing them away early and buying new products, they would save up to £47.3 billion a year.

The research found that resource efficiency could have an immediate impact in reducing greenhouse gas emissions – saving up to 254m tonnes over the next ten years.

One of the lead authors, Dr John Barrett, from SEI, at the University of York, said: "This report outlines a set of strategies that can, collectively, make a real contribution to ambitious and necessary climate change

This report outlines a set of strategies that can, collectively, make a real contribution to ambitious and necessary climate change targets

Dr John Barrett


Contact details

David Garner
Senior Press Officer

Tel: +44 (0)1904 432153

dcg501@york.ac.uk

Keep up to date

 [Subscribe to news feeds](#)

 [Follow us on Twitter](#)

targets.”

Liz Goodwin, WRAP CEO said: “In the run up to Copenhagen, this research has an important message. It shows that resource efficiency could prove a secret weapon as it allows immediate action to meet pressing and challenging targets.”

ENDS



Notes to editors:

- ▶ WRAP helps individuals, businesses and local authorities to reduce waste and recycle more, making better use of resources and helping to tackle climate change.
- ▶ Established as a not-for-profit company in 2000, WRAP is backed by government funding from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- ▶ Working in seven key areas (Construction, Retail, Manufacturing, Organics, Business Growth, Behavioural Change, and Local Authority Support), WRAP's work focuses on market development and support to drive forward recycling and materials resource efficiency within these sectors, as well as wider communications and awareness activities including the multi-media national Recycle Now campaign for England.
- ▶ More information on all of WRAP's programmes can be found on www.wrap.org.uk. For further media information contact Sarah Brown, on 01295 819618 or email sarah.brown@wrap.org.uk
- ▶ The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) is an international, independent environment and development research institute. It is a part of an international network of centres with the York centre based in the Department of Biology at the University of York.
- ▶ The University of York's [Department of Biology](#) is one of the leading centres for biological teaching and research in the UK. In the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise, it was ranked equal first among broad spectrum bioscience departments in the UK for quality that was judged to be world-leading. The Department both teaches degree courses and undertakes research across the whole spectrum of modern Biology, from molecular genetics and biochemistry to ecology. Its biomedical research includes an Immunology and Infection Unit (jointly with the Hull York Medical School), work on infertility and three research professors funded by Yorkshire Cancer Research and York Against Cancer.