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Earth Day Reality Check: Consumers ‘Clueless’ About Home Energy Environmental Impact Despite Rising Green Affinity *Green Marketers Must Jump Education Hurdle; ‘Mass-Green’ Messages Often Fall Flat*

Knoxville, Tenn. – As environmental action enters the spotlight this 38th annual Earth Day on April 22, 2008, a national study shows that consumers remain largely “clueless” about residential energy use impacting greenhouse gas emissions – despite a vast U.S. marketing movement toward green affinity and awareness in recent years.

According to Energy Pulse®, a national survey conducted annually since 2005 on consumer attitudes toward energy, energy efficiency and green product marketability, Americans hold several critical misperceptions about where residential energy comes from and which categories of energy use emit the most greenhouse gases:

- Two-thirds of consumers do not know that nearly half of all electricity (48 percent) is produced by burning coal.
- Less than four percent of consumers name coal-fired electricity production as the most prominent man-made contributor to climate issues. (The reality: electricity generation accounts for 41 percent of CO₂, or nearly one-third – 32.8 percent – of all greenhouse gases.)
- Nineteen percent of consumers think that hydroelectric generation is the number one source of electricity. (The reality: the U.S. Energy Information Administration cites that hydro is the source of only three percent of U.S. electricity).
- Nearly 30 percent of consumers think car and truck emissions present the worst man-made cause of global warming / climate change. (The reality: transportation from personal cars, diesel trucks, heavy duty vehicles and jet fuel accounts for 26 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Personal vehicles account for only 15.7 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions.)

“Apart from survey data, we have found through focus groups nationwide that consumers simply don’t have the facts straight about how energy generation for buildings we live and work in contribute to greenhouse gases,” said CEO Suzanne Shelton of Shelton Group, founder of the Energy Pulse study.

“People hop in their cars feeling guilty about their tailpipes but are completely oblivious to the lights they left turned on at the house or that their thermostat was left at 65 degrees in the middle of August,” Shelton said.

“People hop in their cars feeling guilty about their tailpipes but are completely oblivious to 10 lights left on at the house or their 65-degree thermostat in the middle of August.”
-Suzanne Shelton, CEO, Shelton Group

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According to Shelton, advertisers must factor in the consumer awareness void when promoting energy-efficient or sustainable products and services, since awareness is fundamental toward motivating behavior changes, including purchasing shifts toward green products.

“If consumers don’t understand how their long-held energy use behaviors are causing a problem, they aren’t going to be nearly as motivated to adopt new green choices, particularly in these economic times when most people’s first priority is saving money,” Shelton said.

“Way too many marketers are pitching consumers on the idea of ‘green for the sake of green,’ which is not only quickly evolving into a wishy-washy, ineffective message but it’s also at the crux of the whole ‘greenwashing’ consumer backlash that’s well-documented at this point,” said Shelton, whose Energy Pulse data cites widespread consumer skepticism toward green messages.

Shelton encourages companies to avoid “a knee-jerk approach” in crafting green marketing campaigns and to do enough independent research of their customer base’s true awareness levels and motivational factors before “unleashing a meaningless, mass-green message.”

Shelton Group will release in spring 2008 a new study in addition to its fourth annual Energy Pulse 2008 study this fall. Eco Pulse 2008, expected to be released this June, will explore in-depth a wide range of elements influencing the effectiveness of green and sustainable product marketing, apart from energy use issues analyzed in the Energy Pulse study.

ABOUT SHELTON GROUP:

Established in 1991 and based in Knoxville, Tenn., Shelton Group is a full-service advertising agency providing market research and strategy, branding, advertising and creative services to clients across the United States, with accounts that include BP Solar, Vectren Energy, the American Institute of Architects and Knauf Insulation. Shelton Group specializes in taking energy-efficient and green products and services to market and independently sponsors the annual Energy Pulse national consumer study that evaluates consumer attitudes, opinions and purchasing behaviors relative to energy use and green / energy-efficient products. The study will enter its fourth consecutive year in fall 2008. www.energypulse.org and www.sheltoncom.com

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