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## Overindulgence Is Not the Green Option

***At this time of year, indulgence is the buzzword. Luxury goods to buy, roaring fires to relax by, jetting off to sunnier climes, visiting distant friends and family. But, how does this festive spirit align with environmental obligations and our attitudes to going green? More to the point indulgence isn't just for Christmas it's for the whole year. Even during a severe economic downturn many people luxuriating in consumer goods, driving needlessly and turning up the thermostat in winter or the air-conditioning in summer as a right, foregoing their green credentials again and again***

Now, Erling Holden of Sogn and Fjordane University College, in Sogndal, and Kristin Linnerud of the Cicero Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research, in Oslo, Norway, have quantified this dichotomy between environmental attitudes and energy indulgence in the home. Writing in the *International Journal of Sustainable Development*, the team has carried out surveys to find a statistical correlation between factors that influence our ability to behave in an environmentally friendly way and the mechanisms of household consumption that contradict those attitudes.

They have revealed three paradoxical aspects of this problem. First, they discovered that a desire to project an environmentally friendly image has little influence on energy use in the home or on transport. Secondly, a sense of powerlessness prevents people from translating positive environmental attitudes into low energy use in the home and for everyday transport. Thirdly, a desire to self-indulge prevents people from translating their purportedly environmentally friendly attitudes into low energy use for

long distance leisure travel, commonly air travel.

The team points out that, "Public information and awareness campaigns can give consumers information on how to behave in an environmentally responsible way, but tend only to influence categories of consumption with little environmental impact." They add that, "Structural change can be used to mitigate the effect of the sense of powerlessness and encourage environmentally friendly behaviour, but the desire to self-indulge is much more difficult to deal with."

When considering how we approach the issue of our environmental impact, the question that arises again and again and applies equally to taking one more luxury chocolate at Christmas as to booking that exotic holiday: "What is more important: our desire to indulge or the environmental impact of our activities?"

Environmental attitudes and household consumption: an ambiguous relationship. *Int. J. Sustainable Development*, 2010, 13, 217-231