



No Impact Experiment
Long-Term Results Report

No Impact Project

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Introduction

The No Impact Project was launched amid response to Executive Director Colin Beavan's No Impact Man book, blog, and documentary, which document his family's year-long experiment of making zero net impact on the environment. This widely publicized experiment inspired thousands of people, from all walks of life, to take part in their own No Impact challenge. The No Impact Project was established to provide the framework and community necessary to ensure that the experience of a No Impact Experiment is positive, educational, and serves as a launch pad into environmental activism. The No Impact Project has since expanded this vision into a series of programs created to reach outside the "environmental choir" to people on both sides of the political aisle.

Our primary program is the No Impact Experiment (also called the No Impact Week). This program is an eight-day carbon cleanse that guides participants through daily challenges, from creating no trash, to eating locally, to volunteering in their own communities. The experiment is designed to give participants a new lens with which to view their own lives and to empower them to control the role they play in the world by reducing their own consumption and use of resources, becoming civically and politically engaged, and making crucial choices about their future.

To date, forty universities and ten communities in countries around the world have hosted No Impact Experiments. Workplaces around the country have hosted No Impact Experiments for their employees and the Huffington Post, YES! Magazine and the National Resource Defense Council have hosted virtual No Impact Experiments on their websites. Some 50,000 people have now experienced the No Impact Week.

We wish to emphasize that this is not 50,000 people taking an hour out of their day. It is 50,000 people dedicating a week of their lives to learn how to make a lower impact on the environment. In total this is 8,400,000 hours spent working towards building a more positive and sustainable future.

The theory behind No Impact Week is that changing actions changes thoughts, attitudes, and values. We believe if you get people to act differently--even if it is only because their friends and classmates are doing it--then long-term behavioral and attitude change follows ("move a muscle, change a thought"). By succeeding in getting individuals to take the first step of taking action in their personal lives, more people then become responsive to collective calls to action. Through this method, we aim to broaden the network of the environmental movement and increase the number of people willing to take action, not only in their own lives but in their own communities, nation, and beyond.

It has been more than two years since the launch of this program, and we are now in a position to measure the long-term effects of the No Impact Experiment program and test our foundational hypotheses. The questions we seek to answer are: Do we reach people outside of the choir and bring them into the environmental movement and increase civic engagement? Since people are liable to drop behaviors that make them unhappy, are we able to introduce them to a lifestyle that makes them happier? Are we successful in helping to precipitate cultural change towards less consumption?

Methodology

To measure the impact of our program, we worked with psychology and statistics professionals to develop pre- and post-experiment surveys which measure the before and after behaviors and attitudes of our program participants.

Before each week-long No Impact Experiment, the No Impact Project has asked participants to fill out a brief survey about their behaviors from the past month. These questions ask participants how often they engage in environmentally friendly lifestyle choices such as eating vegetarian and minimizing consumption and water use. The survey also asks questions to gauge the level of civic engagement prior to the No Impact Experiment, such as how often participants vote for politicians proposing environmentally friendly policies, volunteer in their local communities, and contribute to environmental organizations.

After the No Impact Experiment, the No Impact Project sends out a post-week survey that asks participants how they have been affected by their No Impact experience and how they will alter their lifestyles to incorporate these changes. Our most recent survey aims to study how these post-experiment lifestyle changes endure in the long run.

Two weeks ago, we sent past participants a new survey to measure their current lifestyles and the long-term impact of the No Impact Experiment on their lives. We offered no incentives for filling out the 15 minute survey other than helping us to study and improve our program and to help them reflect on their current lifestyle. We were pleased that through the promotion of a single email, we received over 400 completed surveys from past participants.

Summary:

Based on the answers of survey respondents, two years after the No Impact Experiment the majority of participants not only maintain major lifestyle changes, but also become activists committed to volunteering in their communities and bringing about legislative change. Furthermore, respondents have reported that these adaptations have contributed to their overall happiness. (The quotes below were taken from our recent survey results.)

- The majority of No Impact Week participants reported that being involved in the No Impact Experiment has made their lives happier.

“This whole experiment gives me hope for the future.”

- Two years after the No Impact Experiment, participants are 105% more likely to choose reusable products over disposable products.

*“...This experiential learning is essential if we are to "choose" to do with less. It is a mind-shift.
“Thank-you for offering positive solutions.”*

- Two years after the No Impact Experiment, participants are 137% more likely to vote for public officials proposing environmentally friendly policies than they were before participating in the No Impact Experiment.

“... I can proudly call myself an activist now.”

- Two years after the No Impact Experiment, participants are 160% more likely to regularly volunteer in their local communities than they were before participating in the No Impact Experiment.

“We just started a community garden... and started a recycling program with 5 other friends and families.”

- Two years after the No Impact Experiment, participants are 79% more likely to stay informed of environmental issues than before the No Impact Experiment.

“I often hear from the students that they're still living it and making thoughtful choices about consumerism. What a gift!!!”

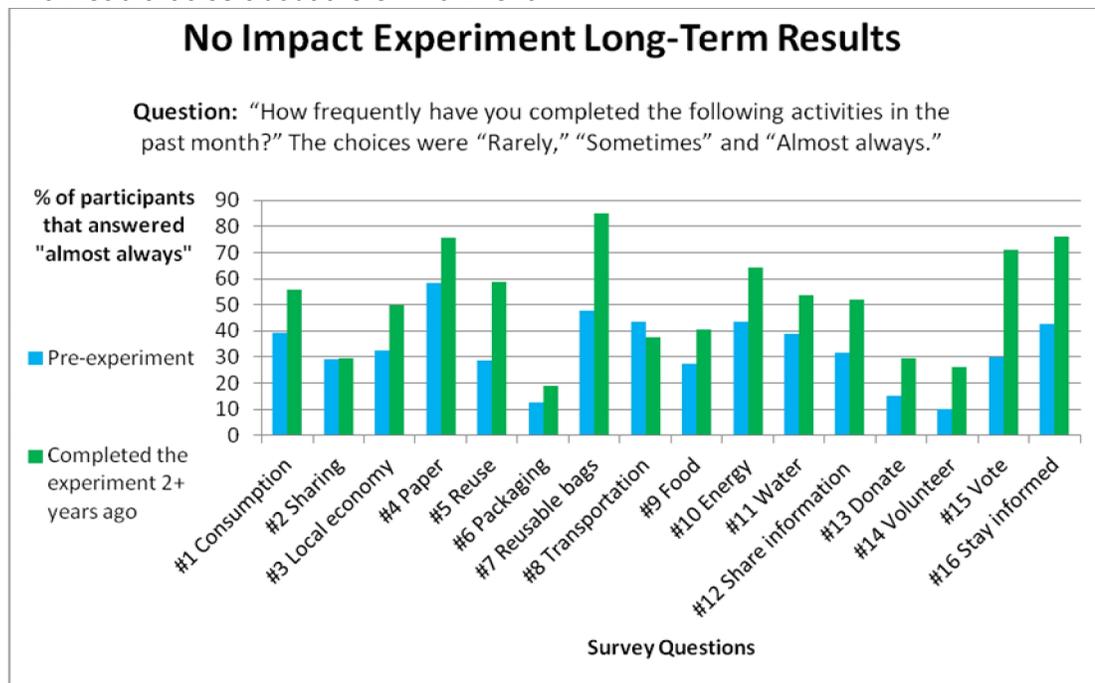
Quantitative Results:

Behavioral Change

Results were derived by asking participants how frequently they participated in a number of activities in the past month. Below, pre-experiment answers are compared with the answers from our most recent survey which asked participants who completed the experiment two or more years ago about their current lifestyles.

Question: "How frequently have you completed the following activities in the past month?" The choices were "Rarely," "Sometimes" and "Almost always."

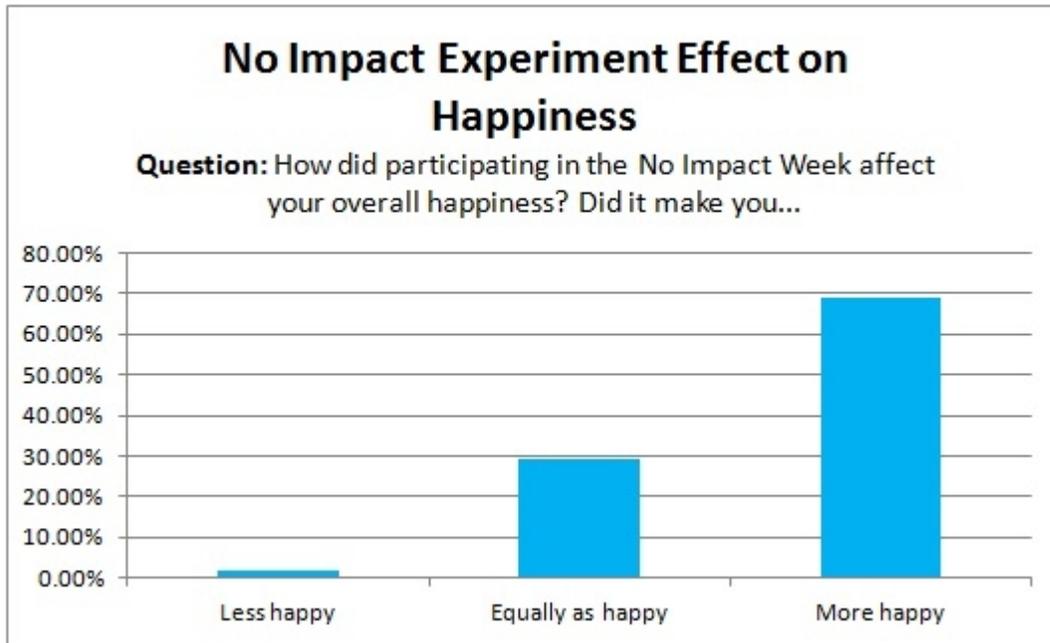
- #1 Consciously keep my consumption to a minimum
- #2 Share clothes/ books/ tools/ other items with a neighbor before buying new ones
- #3 Shop at locally owned stores (as opposed to franchises)
- #4 Reuse paper (e.g., using both sides)
- #5 Primarily purchase durable, reusable products (no paper towels, napkins, etc.)
- #6 Avoid buying products with any packaging
- #7 Bring my own shopping bags for groceries
- #8 Travel primarily by bicycle, foot, public transit, or carpool
- #9 Eat meals that don't contain meat
- #10 Use energy-efficient appliances
- #11 Minimize the amount of water I use
- #12 Pass along information to friends regarding how they can help the environment
- #13 Contribute regularly to an environmental organization
- #14 Volunteer regularly for an environmental cause in my local community
- #15 Vote for public officials proposing environmentally conscious policies
- #16 Read articles about the environment



Change in Self-Reported Happiness

Results were derived by asking participants who had participated in the No Impact Experiment two or more years ago to report how they felt their experience with the No Impact Experiment had affected their overall happiness. The choices were “less happy,” “equally as happy,” and “more happy.” Participant’s answers are compared in the graph below.

Question: “How did participating in the No Impact Week affect your overall happiness? Did it make you less happy, equally as happy, or more happy?”



Qualitative Results

In addition to asking specific survey questions, we also asked respondents to give anecdotal evidence of the effects of the week. Space was provided for respondents to write two or three sentences on the question below. Some quotes are provided.

Taken together, responses fell along a number of themes to suggest some unexpected effects of the No Impact Experiment:

- The experiment affected larger life decisions such as choice of career and living situation.
- The experiment led to greater focus about participant's own role in bringing about change in the face of environmental crises.
- People felt less isolated having found a community of like-minded thinkers through the experiment.

Question: "What long-term effects did the No Impact Experiment have on your lifestyle?" Please see examples of common answers below (see more in the attached appendix):

*"I **changed jobs** to be within walking distance of work. **Changed housing** to a smaller footprint. Have become involved with a recycling and composting program at work and will be part of a pilot project to implement the same type of program in our multi-family building..."*

*"**Mental clarity**. It is easier to think when you have a plan about what you are doing in the world, and **less depressing** regarding environmental disasters."*

*"We decided to go **"car free"** shortly after beginning the NIE. We also **started buying into a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)**. These have become deep and meaningful parts of our lives."*

*"Reading the book and going thru the experiment was part of my decision to make a **career change**, from financial engineer to sustainable building engineering (this year)."*

*"...enabled me to create **community** surrounding these behaviors."*

"REMINDED US THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE."

*"...I am a **youth and children's minister** in a local church. My programs no longer use **paper plates and cups or disposable utensils**."*

*"I found some **changes became contagious** throughout school, neighborhood and among friends."*

*"It **changed my life and that of my kids**'. We are working everyday to "save the planet" as my kids say. **LOVE IT!**"*

*"It **stopped the race for more, more, more**. What a relief!!!! I enjoy what I have more fully than ever before and finally have some **empty shelves and empty spaces** in my house. Yes!!!!!"*

*"**The No Impact Experiment completely changed my life**... I have shared NIE and the experiences I have had from it with many friends and family members."*

Conclusion

The No Impact Project has now been operating for more than two years. Our fundamental assumptions are that by empowering people to change their own lives, the No Impact Experiment is able to reach people outside of the choir and bring them into the environmental movement through increased civic engagement, and long-term lifestyle changes. These changes are made sustainable by helping people identify what truly brings them happiness and fulfillment. We tested these assumptions by asking past participants to describe the effect the No Impact Experiment had on their lives and their current behaviors two years afterward. The results of the survey lead us to the following conclusions:

- The No Impact Experiment increases long-term activism and civic engagement.
- The No Impact Experiment brings about long-term change in every day behaviors which leads participants to larger lifestyle changes such as career, housing and location.
- The lifestyle adaptations made as a result of the No Impact Experiment have contributed to participant's long-term happiness.

These results show us that the No Impact Experiment program not only brings about the cultural change needed to involve people from all sides of the political aisle in the environmental agenda, but also adds sustainability to the movement by contributing to people's happiness and sense of fulfillment.

Communities, universities, and other organizations, both nationally and internationally, have recognized the success of the No Impact Experiment. We are working hard to maintain the increasing demand for our programs. Inside the United States, we are expanding to new universities and communities as well as to high schools and middle schools around the country.

We have also seen an increase in demand for our programs outside of the United States. The need to engage the broader public in seeking environmental solutions is becoming increasingly clear to countries around the world. In the coming year, we will be partnering with local organizations to expand our programs to Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe.

In addition to expanding our programs, we are also continually striving to improve our work so that we may better reach our goals. In addition to this survey, we partnered with a class at Penn State's Positive Psychology graduate program this past spring to evaluate and improve our programs based on the positive psychology principles. We will continue monitoring and improving our programs as we expand to reach new populations and geographies.

Appendix:

Question: What long-term effects did the No Impact Experiment have on your lifestyle?

"I compost my food now and use a rain-barrel to water my garden. I am growing vegetables for the first time. I am aware of packaging and try to buy things in bulk using my own containers."

"We feel more in control of our lives with less consumption, waste, and stuff."

"When I am working towards no-impact it makes me feel better than I usually do!"

"We no longer use paper towels or napkins, we use only cloth. I have a nice collection of reusable shopping bags that I use all the time. Our clothes dryer broke but we have not bought another and feel good about that."

"The project made me stop and really think about the everyday things that I was doing. With the help of the project I have made changes that not only helped the environment, but also my quality of life. And the added bonus of extra money in the bank."

"I changed jobs to be within walking distance of work. Changed housing to a smaller footprint. Have become involved with a recycling and composting program at work and will be part of a pilot project to implement the same type of program in our multi-family building. We just started a community garden on a strip of land in our parking lot where another resident has a flower garden. Small - 3 raised beds thus far (the journey of a thousand miles begins with one step). Have participated in 4 discussion courses with the Northwest Earth Institute and started a recycling program with 5 other friends and families."

"I no longer feel an addiction to consumption. It is a fun challenge for me to reuse what I have and allows me to be more creative. As a result, I am happier and can save my money for more worthwhile things."

"I now know how to take public transportation, in my town. (I rode my bike mostly, but in the rain, I took the bus during my No Impact week.)"

"I am basically a vegetarian now and have started making more vegetarian meals for my child. My son and I started a garden and have been working on it together now. I shop at the farmer's market on the weekend. I now purchase health, beauty, and cleaning products that have less impact on the environment."

"Think it has helped us to be more mindful of our whole lifestyle. We are healthier, happier and in general. We're generally healthier, and we have reduced our impact on the environment. We buy local...shop local and support our local farmers market...and we spend more time together."

"It made me more aware of things like how much water I use, how much packaging is on food, and how much waste I produce. I had never really paid attention to those things before this project."

"I care more about my surroundings"

"I was pleased to discover that after my first no impact week, the second one seemed like a piece of

cake. I couldn't believe how many of the changes that I didn't seem committed to at the time actually became part of my daily routine and thought process. I am much more aware of my consumer habits and try to encourage others to do the same."

"You reminded me of where I came from, what's important. People think I'm nuts for saving water, having cloth napkins. Thank you for being savvy enough to make it popular."

"Vegetarian lifestyle, we recycle everything and barely have trash. It's a great feeling to live this way."

"Will never go back to some of the bad habits we once had."

"Increased my sense of purpose in living consciously for the benefit of others."

"I ride my bicycle in all seasons now and use it for almost all of my in-town transportation. I am more mindful all-around of my impact."

"The No Impact Experiment completely changed my life. It made me reevaluate everything and realize there was no reason to excuse taking part in a consumerist lifestyle. I am much more conscious about every decision I make and how much impact it will have on myself and the world around me. I have shared NIE and the experiences I have had from it with many friends and family members."

"Completely changed my lifestyle. I have a very minimal carbon footprint. I certainly live the way I would like to see others live."

"I consciously consume much less in general. The phrase "going shopping" (unless in reference to groceries) has become almost non-existent in my vocabulary."

"Life has become clearer. We have fewer distractions (stuff, buying, dealing with our stuff) and more room to pursue real life. Less stuff means less money spent on stuff, means I don't have to work as much, means we can spend money on things that really matter to us. Stuff we've downsized, we were able to share with the community through garage sales, this helped us meet all our new neighbors and share things with them that they needed but we had too much of. Pretty cool!"

"My view on life has changed completely: I practically never drive a car, I haven't bought a new piece of clothing for months, I reduced my garbage production to a minimum, I'm writing a blog."

"It got me to see that some of the big changes are not so hard. It's making it easier to set long term goals for reducing my consumption. It has helped open up dialog with a lot of different people in my life about how to go about sustainable change on a practical level. Gives me hope."

"So much! I've learned so much about how my lifestyle impacts the Earth. When I first started the project I felt like I couldn't do it, I didn't know what I was doing or how to change. But I kept reading the guide and I kept going to the links and I tried to just improve a little at a time. At first, the create no trash day was soooo hard for me, I felt like a complete failure. Now, I generate almost zero trash. Not only did the No Impact Experiment get me started, it's kept me going and it's taught me so very much."

Question: Anything else you would like to add?

"These No Impact Week Projects should be required activities in public education."

"Thanks for your leadership--please keep up the good work."

"Did the curriculum with my middle school class and had one parent email me thanking me for what I did. She said her daughter came home every day with ideas of things to try at home and she was always excited to tell her mom what she learned."

"Keep up the good work. You are making a difference."

"It was one of the best experiences of my life!"

"When we started with the No Impact week about 3 years ago..we got some seriously weird looks and criticism. Now our biggest critics then have become the people we now exchange tools with, services, books..etc. Most of our changes are no longer a chore and routine life now so yeah it's do-able...for the most part even if ya live in a rural area as we do. Some things we can't cut out like driving but we have come up with a system to reduce the number of trips and condensed errands. It was an eye opening experience and glad we are still living a low impact no impact life."

"I am very grateful that you have created this experiment. I thought of myself as a very conscious person before the experiment but learned that there was much more I could do and be happy about it. The no impact weeks also gave me a great platform for talking to others about environmental issues. Thank you!"

"Please keep running this program! It is really great!"

"Continuing the No Impact Experiment is very important, especially for families and young people. Younger generations will be feeling the brunt of climate change, resource depletion, peak oil and environmental degradation. Having them spend a week lessening their impact will help them understand what's happening in our world. The lessons learned will make them more active personally and politically toward environmental, social and economic issues and better able to make informed decisions as consumers and members of their community. Thanks for creating and maintaining the No Impact Experiment!"

"We should all do this on an annual or semi-annual basis."

"What a great project & movement!"

"Thanks for the good work you do. Most of us know the facts about the environment and climate change, it is the next step: choosing a different path that is tricky. Your experiment is a way to try out new ways and adopt them to our lifestyle. This experiential learning is essential if we are to "choose" to do with less. It is a mind-shift. Thank-you for offering positive solutions."

"Keep this going! I will also. This contributes to a better world one person at a time :)"

"I completed the No Impact Experiment over a year ago, and I can definitely say that it still impacts how I think about consumption and waste every single day. It really and truly made a huge impact. I also am more attuned to how making these choices does make me happier, makes me interact with my community more, and helps to form bonds that wouldn't be there if I just drove everywhere or ordered take out versus going to the farmers market, etc."

"Thank you guys, you are inspiring a lot of people that need it right now!"