

University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service Environmental Consumer Education Program

Illinois' consumer environmental education program educates both consumers and educators and includes both a research and a public policy component.

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The University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service has developed and implemented a comprehensive environmental consumer education program. The goal is to assist consumers in analyzing the tradeoffs necessary to incorporate environmental concerns in their purchase, use, and disposal decisions.

The program assumes that environmental consumer behavior should be based on a hierarchy of four "R" behaviors - reduce, reuse, recycle, and respond. The primary program materials are an eight-unit curriculum and a three-part video. The teaching materials for each unit in the curriculum include a teacher's guide, a major lesson, fact sheets, activities, and overhead transparency masters. The curriculum is intended for use with adults and while it can be used in the classroom, it is very appropriate for informal education. Topics include packaging, life cycle analysis, household hazardous waste, and food safety issues in reuse.

An important component of the University of Illinois program is improving the effectiveness of educators. Basic principles of effective environmental consumer education (see Cude, 1993b) are the focus of Part 1 of the video.

Part 2, "Packaging," describes the functions of packaging and features the preferred packaging guidelines of the Northeastern Coalition of Governors. Part 3, "Health and Safety Issues," spotlights university faculty responding to questions about various issues including household hazardous waste, composting food waste, and safe consumer reuse of packaging.

The environmental consumer education program also has a public policy component. The University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service collected survey data from over 1,000 consumers in 1992 to provide data on consumer perceptions of environmental terms to the Federal Trade Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency (Cude, 1993a). The data we provided were influential to the FTC in their development of the environmental

marketing guidelines they ultimately issued.

The program development and implementation have created a coalition of the Cooperative Extension Service, the Illinois Recycling Association, the Illinois State Department of Energy and Natural Resources, and others. Educators who were working toward the same goal independently are now networking.

Appendix

For more information on the Consumer Environmental Education Curriculum and the video ("Making Choices With the Environment In Mind") write University of Illinois, 67-ES Mumford Hall, 1301 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana, IL 61801 or phone 217/333-2007.

References

- Cude, B.J. (1993a). Consumer perceptions of environmental marketing claims: An exploratory study. *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, 17, 207-225.
- Cude, B.J. (1993b). Teaching environmental consumer education effectively. *Advancing the Consumer Interest*, 5 (1), 12-17.

Endnotes

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