

# BNWATSH01: Consumer views about showers - summary report

Version 1.1

This Briefing Note and referenced information is a public consultation document and will be used to inform Government decisions. The information and analysis form part of the Evidence Base created by Defra's Market Transformation Programme.

## 1. Summary

This Briefing Note explores shower flow rate from the consumer perspective. It addresses the following questions:

- How important is flow rate in determining the comfort and effectiveness of showers?
- Do users understand that higher flow rates mean increased water consumption?
- How important is water consumption compared to comfort?
- How useful would consumers find labels which provide information about water consumption?

## 2. Approach

Three focus group sessions were carried out with members of the public who owned showers. Each focus group session was carried out in a different area: one in an affluent area with average water charges, one in a less affluent area with average water charges, and one in an area with higher water charges. Each focus group included consumers with and without water meters, covering a range of ages, and including men and women (except in one group which turned out to be exclusively male)<sup>1</sup>. Consumers were encouraged to attend focus groups irrespective of how much they used or liked their showers.

The groups discussed a number of topics in an open-ended way, rather than answering a preset series of questions. The topics included: how much use they make of their showers, what makes a shower comfortable and effective, how much water they think showers use, how important water consumption is, what information they would like when selecting a shower, and what they think of the idea of a water label.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that the scale of the project and the small number of focus groups makes it difficult to identify recurrent and diverse patterns.

### **3. Views about flow rate and comfort**

High flow rate is universally seen as a key feature of a good shower. In some cases consumers simply want enough water to wash off soap and shampoo. In other cases they want a high skin pressure sensation for an invigorating or relaxing shower.

However, skin pressure can be excessive. Some showers are found to be uncomfortably strong. Some consumers also like different strengths in different circumstances, typically preferring strong showers in the morning and gentler ones in the evening.

Although flow rate is key, other features play a role in determining shower comfort and efficacy. Temperature stability is a widespread consideration. The area of the body covered by water is also important, with consumers generally preferring showers to cover a wide area. Droplet size barely features in their views about what makes a good shower.

Other aspects of showers, besides the characteristics of the spray, are important to consumers. For some, particularly older people, difficulty in getting in and out as well as the risk of slipping when in the shower are major concerns. Space for movement and storage of showering products is also a desirable feature. Looks and ease of cleaning are salient to some, primarily women.

The shower surroundings also affect comfort. A warm, draught-free room with adequate ventilation is ideal. On the whole, consumers prefer solid shower doors or cubicles to shower curtains.

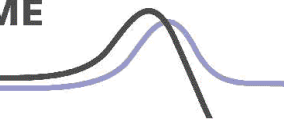
### **4. Understanding about flow rate and water consumption**

There is a lack of consensus on whether baths use more water than showers. Some consumers are firmly of the view that they do, but others believe that they, or family members, take such long showers that they inevitably use as much or more water than a bath. A clear message is that time spent in the shower, and therefore water used, varies between people and, for any one person, between occasions.

Consumers are also divided on whether higher flow rate showers use more water. Although it is understood that more water is delivered in a given time, some consumers think that this means that showering time is correspondingly less and water use is therefore no different.

### **5. Priority Given to Water Consumption**

Consumers are divided about whether it is important to save water by taking showers rather than baths or by keeping showers short. Four factors come into play:



- Whether consumers are concerned about the cost of water. For metered consumers, this is more of a consideration where charges are higher and in less affluent areas.
- Whether consumers are concerned about the environment. While some believe that water conservation is worthwhile, there is a view that there is no point in saving water as there is plenty and it is recycled. Water shortages only raise awareness in the short term.
- Whether consumers believe that water used by showers accounts for a substantial part of their water use. (This issue was not included in the topic guide and was only occasionally raised by participants.)
- Whether consumers consider the energy used by showers as well as water use. It is rare for them to do so.

Although there are some consumers who would take water efficiency into account when selecting showers, this is far from widespread. This is partly because consumers tend to believe, as discussed above, that water savings are made by opting to have a shower of any sort rather than by selecting a water efficient shower. They also tend to give priority to having a comfortable and effective shower rather than saving water.

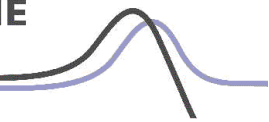
## 6. Views about water labels

Consumers who believe that water efficiency is important in selecting a shower would welcome a water label to inform their choice. However, other consumers would not take this information into account, would give it low priority, and might even be put off buying a water efficient shower because they assume that it will be a less effective or comfortable shower.

If information on water consumption is to be provided, consumers recognise a number of other potential pitfalls.

- It may be difficult to understand for members of the public and for those who advise them, such as plumbers and shop assistants.
- It may not be seen as trustworthy.
- It may be useful for comparing different showers, but may only show which is better but not by how much.
- It would not provide accurate information on water consumption for individual homes as this depends on a number of variables, including type of plumbing.

Finally, there is a feeling among consumers that information provided through labels, or even more detailed information provided in leaflets, is unconvincing. They believe that the most convincing information when buying a shower is in the form of a working shower that they can put their hand under. It is also suggested that information on its own is insufficient to change buying habits and that financial incentives might be needed to persuade them to buy water efficient showers.



## 7. Acknowledgements

This project was carried out with the support of:

- The Bathroom Manufacturers Association
- Essex and Suffolk Water
- South West Water
- Three Valleys Water

### Related MTP information

Briefing notes:

BNWAT06: Showers – water efficiency performance tests

BNDW Shower: Shower design and efficiency

RP WA02-06: Consumer Views about Showers

### Changes from version 1.0

Changes to the reference for the full report. Minor changes to terminology.

### Consultation and further information

Stakeholders are encouraged to review this document and provide suggestions that may improve the quality of information provided, email [info@mtprog.com](mailto:info@mtprog.com) quoting the document reference, or call the MTP enquiry line on +44 (0) 845 600 8951.

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