



NEWS RELEASE

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Water Under The Bridge? Knowledgeable Consumers More Sympathetic To Water Companies

Research carried out by DJS Research Ltd (<http://www.djsresearch.co.uk>), relating to the recent implementation of hosepipe bans across some of the country, has revealed widely divergent opinions towards the provision of water and the lengths to which people will go to defend these opinions. DJS Research interviewed 504 respondents across the South, South East and East Anglia, who live in areas initially hit by the ban.

Despite being of little inconvenience to the vast majority of respondents – only 3% stated the ban would impact them ‘significantly’ – awareness of the ban was high, with 94% mindful that they lived in an affected area. However, respondents did not fully understand what a hosepipe ban meant. Whilst 90% understood it to mean not watering the garden with a hosepipe, 73% associated it with filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool and 67% with the maintenance or filling of a domestic pond or ornamental fountain.

Almost one in ten (8%) said they were likely to flout the ban, however, it may be that more are unknowingly flouting it, thinking it’s acceptable to maintain their pond or fill their paddling pool which are not allowed during the ban. Despite, or perhaps due to this lack of impact or understanding, three quarters believed that there should be a penalty for breaking the regulations.

All in all, the majority (75%) felt that there should be a penalty for breaking the regulations and almost half of all respondents (45%) stated they would personally inform on their neighbours if they found them acting contrary to the guidelines. Amongst this group, support for a penalty reached 92%, with almost three quarters (72%) believing that a penalty of £1000 is appropriate. This latter figure drops to half (51%) when all respondents are considered. In short, a large proportion of people want to see those breaking the rules punished, and would be prepared to inform the water companies – even with the knowledge that their neighbours would suffer financially.

The source of this friction is, potentially, the level of education about the water situation in the UK. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that ‘I’m not so sure we’re as desperately short of water as we’re made to believe’. Whilst only a third (32%), of those who would shop a neighbour agreed, nearly half (44%) of those who wouldn’t inform on a neighbour agreed, suggesting that those unwilling to shop a neighbour don’t believe that the water shortage issue is as serious. Similarly, over half (58%) of those who would flout the

ban agreed that we're not as desperately short of water, compared to 36% who would not flout the ban.

Problematically, almost two thirds of water customers (64%) believe the water companies are somewhat responsible for the ban, with an additional 30% believing they are completely responsible. The main reason cited by respondents was the amount of leaks that go unfixed.

Of those who agreed that they did not need to worry about being short on water, 9 in 10 (87%) also agreed that the water companies had been irresponsible by not saving water to avoid a drought – suggesting that ignorance of the water situation leads to misplaced frustration with the water companies.

Though indicative, this research clearly suggests that a large proportion of the public in drought affected areas intend to abide by the hosepipe ban, and that those who are more knowledgeable about water are prepared to assist the water companies in enforcing such regulations. Education about the water situation in Britain is a key method for water companies to increase buy-in among consumers, and those who are more knowledgeable appear to sympathise with the water companies to a much greater extent than those who lack a proper understanding of the availability of water.

Despite the relatively dry winter experienced in 2011/12, many respondents continued to blame the water companies' inability to maintain the pipe networks for the drought. Improving the provision of information for water consumers influences their likelihood to abide by regulations put in place to conserve water during periods of drought, and also seems to impact on more general opinions of water companies and their role in the supply of water. As a result, water companies should actively seek to educate their customers about water shortages, how they occur, the actions taken by organisations to avoid them, what individuals can do to help the sometimes unavoidable nature of the issue.

APPENDIX – RESEARCH FINDINGS IN DETAIL

Research Methodology

- ❖ The research was conducted at the end of April 2012

- ❖ 504 residents took part in an online survey lasting around 10 minutes in length.
- ❖ Residents lived across the South, South East and East Anglia, who live in areas initially hit by the water ban.
- ❖ We achieved a good mix by gender, age, metered/unmetered households.
- ❖ The majority of the sample were responsible for paying their household water bills.

Impact

- ❖ Just 3% stated that the hosepipe ban would have a significant impact on their daily lives and 58% reported it would have a moderate impact but they could largely go ahead with their daily activities. 39% claimed it would have no impact on them personally.
- ❖ Of those who are likely to use a hosepipe during the ban 70% claim that it would have a moderate impact and 18% claim it would have a significant impact.

Confusion over regulations

- ❖ A quarter (27%) of consumers fail to recognise that filling or maintaining a domestic swimming or paddling pool is not allowed during the ban.
- ❖ A further 37% believe that filling/maintaining a domestic pond or ornamental pond is acceptable
- ❖ There is also confusion about what is still allowed, with 36% believing that private motor vehicle businesses specialising in hand car washing are not allowed to use hosepipes.
- ❖ Those who stated they were unlikely to use a hosepipe during the ban are more likely to be aware of the rules and regulations. This is demonstrated by 94% realising that watering a garden with a hosepipe is not allowed, compared to 73% of those who are likely to use a hosepipe.

Likely to use hosepipe

- ❖ 83% of consumers say that they are unlikely to use a hosepipe during the ban, with just 8% admitting they are likely.
- ❖ Of those who claimed they would not be impacted at all by the ban, 91% state that they would not use a hosepipe, compared to 80% of those who claimed they would be moderately impacted by the ban. This suggests that the likelihood of usage depends on how much the consumer is impacted by the ban.
- ❖ Over four fifths (88%) of those likely to inform on a neighbour are unlikely to use a hosepipe during the ban, compared to 79% of those who wouldn't inform.
- ❖ Reasons why consumers might use a hosepipe tend to be because of gardening purposes "In a situation when plants in my garden start to die out because of poor water supply" "I have had a new lawn laid" etc...

Attitudes towards hosepipe penalty and fine

- ❖ Three quarters (75%) agree that there should be a penalty for those who do not comply with the regulations of the ban, with just 8% disagreeing.
- ❖ Similarly, 82% of those who are **unlikely** to use a hosepipe during the ban agree with the penalty, compared to 43% who are likely.
- ❖ 92% of those who would inform about a neighbour believe that they should face a penalty, compared to 62% of those who wouldn't inform about a neighbour.
- ❖ Half (51%) agree that the £1000 is a suitable amount with 32% disagreeing.
- ❖ 62% of over 55's agree with the current £1000 penalty amount, compared to 49% of 25-54 year olds.
- ❖ Of those who are unlikely to use a hosepipe 56% agree with the fine amount, compared to 30% of those who are likely to use a hosepipe.
- ❖ 72% of those who are likely to inform if they knew of a neighbour breaking the regulations believe that the penalty is fair. Compared to 34% of those who would not inform.
- ❖ Of those who disagreed with the amount, many suggested a fine of £500 or lower, "A £100 fine is more acceptable" and a few suggested community service.

Informing of a neighbour

- ❖ 45% of consumers would inform the local water company if they knew a neighbour was ignoring the hosepipe ban.
- ❖ Those who are most likely to inform the water companies are those over 55 with 57% claiming they would inform, compared to just 43% of 25-54 year olds.
- ❖ 47% of those who are unlikely to use a hosepipe would inform if they knew of a neighbour ignoring the ban compared to 25% who are likely to use a hosepipe.

Water shortages

- ❖ **Respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement: I'm not so sure we're as desperately short of water as we're made to believe**
- ❖ 43% of 18-54 year olds agreed with this statement compared to 23% of the over 55's, suggesting that older people are more likely to believe it is an issue
- ❖ Those likely to use a hosepipe were more likely to agree with the statement than those not (58% vs. 36%), suggesting that those willing to waive the ban have less of an understanding of water shortages
- ❖ Those likely to inform on a neighbour were less likely to agree with the statement than those not (32% vs. 44%), suggesting that those willing to go to the length of informing on a neighbour think it is more of an issue than those who wouldn't

NOTES TO EDITORS

DJS Research Ltd is an independent UK based consultancy, specialising in market research with both consumers and businesses. It has extensive experience of implementing and managing quantitative and qualitative market research projects within various UK industry and international sectors.

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