

# HIPPO THE WATER SAVER

## Results summary of a trial direct mailing

A covering letter, instructions and a free Hippo Water Saver were pushed through the letter boxes of a trial group (152 households) as a simulation of a direct mail campaign. Householders were asked to fit the bag themselves. The results were as follows:

### Initial response

Not interested	56%
No reply	25%
Used	19%

### 9 Month Follow up

Taken out	26% (Indicates % of the used group)
Still in use	74% (Indicates % of the used group)

**Summary report on the Use Survey of the Hippo Water Saver**

**Aim of the survey**

The aim of the survey was to assess the public's reaction to a simulated mailshot and in particular to:

1. obtain information on take up rates and use in the long term.
2. to canvas their views on the product.

## Methods

Three areas were selected for the survey and the number of houses sampled are given in brackets. A council estate in Ross on Wye (23), a new development in Ross on Wye (27) and a middle class well established area of Malvern (102) were surveyed - a total of 152. The houses in Ross on Wye did not have water meters; all the houses in Malvern were connected to meters.

An envelope with a covering letter, Hippo Water Saver, fitting instructions and a questionnaire were delivered (posted through the letterbox) on the first occasion. The intention was that householders would fit the Hippo themselves. In each survey two further visits to the area were made and the householders interviewed when they were in. All of the houses were visited at least twice but at a high proportion (25%) there was no reply. The householders' comments were copied verbatim onto the questionnaire sheets.

The survey was conducted during a period of dry weather in June 1993, and householders who had used the Hippo were followed up in March 1994.

## Results

### Take up and long term use

The overall results of take up and long term use are presented in Table 1. The householders were finally allocated to three categories:

	%	Number of people involved
Not interested	56%	86
No reply	25%	38
Used	19%	28

The 'no reply' group have for the purposes of this report been assumed to be in the 'not interested' group although this lowers the percentage take up figures, although there is likely to have been a similar take up rate in this group potentially providing 23% in the 'used' group.

The use rate was lowest on the council estate (4.3%), highest on the new estate in Ross on Wye (26%), and in two trials in Malvern 20% (50 houses) and 19.2% (52 houses) respectively.

After nine months the 19% use rate had broken down into 74% (of the used group) still in use and 26% (of the used group) taken out of the 21 users contacted.

### Householder responses for those people who used the Hippo

Care was taken to write down householder responses and the results were copied onto the questionnaire.

**Initial response:** This varied enormously but four main topics arose.

1. that it was just a plastic bag - not a device; we had called in a water saving device in our literature.
2. that it was so simple.
3. the association with bricks.
4. intrigue and curiosity to see how it worked.

**Instruction clarity:** we asked those who used it whether they found the instructions clear and the over whelming answer was 'Yes'. We set out a number of points on the instructions for the second Malvern trial to counter some of the points raised. e.g. *'Some questions answered: Yes it is only a plastic bag and yes the holes are supposed to be there. No - there are no moving parts.'*

**How can we improve on the fitting instructions?** There were very few comments here other than to say that they were simple and easy to follow. We provided the fitting instructions on a seperate sheet although most people felt that if the instructions were printed onto the Hippo then this would be quite acceptable.

**Would you fit the device if it came free from the water company?** All replied 'Yes'.

**Why would you fit the device?** The major response to this question was either "saving money" or "saving water" or a response that linked these two together. Some people mentioned the conservation of water and resources linking this to waste. Some said they would fit it because they were curious about whether it would save them money.

**Make of toilet:** We did not ask this question until the follow up interview in March.

**How many toilets do you have?** This question was not followed through in all cases but of those who responded over half had two toilets.

## **Responses to follow up call in March 1994**

During the initial survey we asked whether we could ring them to complete a follow up survey; this seemed to present no problem. Of the 38 people rung only 21 were contacted; this was after at least two calls. Of the 21 contacted in 15 cases the Hippos were still in use. In 6 cases they had taken them out mostly within one month of fitting. They mentioned that the pan didn't seem to clear as well or that tampons wouldn't flush. Two of the 15 had removed the Hippo from only one toilet (we had given out more Hippos if people asked for them) but left them in the remaining toilet.

The main response from people who had installed the bag was that they had " fitted it and forgotten it". None could say if it had saved them either money or water.

## **Responses from people who did not use the Hippo**

### ***If you are not interested - Why?***

We asked this question when we visited all the houses during the initial interview and

there was a very wide range of responses.

"Not interested" with no clarification was by far and away the most common response. Where there was clarification the points made included:

- Already had dual flush working well
- Already have a small cistern
- Already have problems with flushing
- Had lost it or claimed not to have seen it.
- Not got round to it-too busy
- Would if it was endorsed by a water company
- Would use a brick if we wanted to save water
- Couldn't understand the instructions
- No point, we are not on a meter (Ross on Wye)
- Too old

Left outside in the envelope - this seemed to be a common way of returning the Hippo, many people handed them back, although this suggests that as they were not disposed of, in peoples minds a value was attached to the product. In a full scale direct mail campaign then a second mailing may well encourage a take up within this group.

One was chewed by a dog.

A more detailed analysis of this group would highlight questions which could be answered to increase the take up rate.

## **Survey Conclusions and Discussion**

A survey was conducted using the Hippo to simulate a direct mail campaign. It provided figures and householder responses which offer a useful basis for further programmes of action.

The initial take up rate was 19% and 14% were still in place after 9 months; in the context of direct mail operations this is encouragingly high. This is still a small sample and from this trial it seems likely that there will be differences in take up rates between different socio-economic groups. Whether people are metered or not is also likely to make a difference, although it would appear from the take up rates (Ross on Wye) that non metered householders are keen to simply 'save water'.

The responses of the trial group were very valuable. We changed the wording of the covering letter for the second Malvern trial clearly stating that there was no catch and that the Hippos were free - following this, these points were not raised in the second trial. The responses also led to the 'questions answered' section on the revised instructions.

The 'fit and forget' slogan also emerged from our follow up conversations. Well thought out promotion, clear messages and documentation and the backing of a Water Company would undoubtedly improve the overall level of response.

A whole variety of reasons combine to lead to the 'not interested' group. In our survey we to some extent encouraged this by saying to people that if they had any

reservations they should not fit the device (both in the covering letter and the fitting instructions). For what ever the reason householders did not fit the Hippo the conclusion from this survey is that a significant number did. Good promotion, clear messages and instructions will all help increase the take up rate, but in the end only those people who feel confident about fitting it will use the Hippo. As importantly, they will remove it, if it causes any problems. Most had forgotten it was there after 9 months thereby achieving the desired result of **sustained water saving**.

Our trial showed that people understood the reasoning behind the way the Hippo worked.

Although the Hippo idea was conceived in a period of drought the clear message from the water industry is that demand for water is steadily increasing (1% per annum). Although the industry wants to convey the impression that there is always enough water, both the industry and public are well aware that 'wise use' of water is sensible. Increased demand results in pressure for increased capital expenditure and treatment costs. Public awareness initiatives to help encourage wise use and limit demand should therefore be an on-going process. However, unlike public awareness campaigns which rely on literature our evidence begins to show that the Hippo will lead to **immediate** and **sustained water saving**.

Hippo the Water Saver.  
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