

HIPPO WATER SAVING DEVICE

FOLLOW-UP STUDY

DECEMBER 1996

**Management Summary Report**

## **1. BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES**

In August 1996, Sample Surveys Telephone was commissioned by Thames Water to look at the take up of the 'Hippo' water saving device. Following the apparent success of the pilot study in the Banbury district, Thames Water are seriously considering offering the device across all areas.

Prior to making a final decision on this, Thames Water commissioned a follow-up study in December 1996 to look at customer usage of and reactions to the 'Hippo' device some 6 months on. Specifically, the key objectives of the follow up research were as follows:

1. to establish usage of and satisfaction with the device over time
2. to identify any problems or difficulties experienced after an extended period.
3. to review the usage of the Water Conservation leaflet.
4. to explore reactions to the 'Hippo' branding.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The follow-up study was conducted amongst Thames Water customers in the Banbury 'test' region who had received the 'Hippo' information pack and who had fitted or intended to fit the device upon receipt.

The sample was principally made up of those Thames Water customers contacted as part of the initial research study in August 1996. Only those customers who had previously said that they had actually fitted or intended to fit the device were approached.

However, in order to boost the sample a number of customers were contacted for the first time (all registered as having sent off for the offer). Such customers were screened at the outset of the interview to ensure compatibility with the main sample (i.e. they had at least intended to fit the device after having looked at it).

A 10 - 15 minute interview was conducted over the telephone using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). The questionnaire was designed in conjunction with the External Relations department at Thames Water. A total of 205 interviews were conducted in the week prior to Christmas.

The final sample breakdown was as follows:

Sample A - device fitted (contacted in August)	89
Sample B - intended to fit (contacted in August)	40
Sample C - device fitted or intended to fit (not previously contacted)	76

### **3. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

To follow is a summary of the key findings of the latest research. For further detailed information the reader is referred to the computer tabulations held by Thames Water.

#### **3.1 Reactions to the 'Hippo' device**

Encouragingly it was found that more than 75% of those who fitted the 'Hippo' device were still using it.

Over half those who removed the device did so because the toilet was not flushing properly. Other reasons cited include "wrong size/not suitable/doesn't fit", "reduces too much water", "plumbing problems" and "over flowing cistern". Only a small minority experienced such problems, nevertheless this must be of some concern to Thames Water.

Those not previously known to have fitted the device were questioned about whether they had attempted to do so. Fifty four percent reported that they had in fact attempted to fit the device. Of these 75% had done so successfully and most found the device easy to fit. Amongst the small number of people who tried but failed to fit the device, the main reason reported was that it did not fit their cistern.

Of those who never attempted to fit their 'Hippo', 57% said it was simply because they "just hadn't got round to it". For those who made the conscious decision not to fit the device, the reasons given principally related to concerns over compatibility with the toilet/cistern and a fear that the toilet would not work properly. A minority reported that the instructions did not explain how the device worked.

Only one in ten of those who still have the 'Hippo' fitted have experienced any problems with the device. Problems cited include "toilet not flushing properly", "reduces too much water", "overflowing cisterns" and "have to flush twice".

Only 4% of the total sample attempted to modify their 'Hippo'. The main reason given for making the modification was that the 'Hippo' was interfering with water flow. The most popular modification was to cut the bag size and this was successful in half of the cases.

Of those who still have the 'Hippo' fitted, over half reported that they had "more or less forgotten it" prior to the subject being raised by this survey.

Of those who fitted the 'Hippo', including people who subsequently removed it, 79% reported being "very" or "quite" satisfied with the device.

At the end of the survey respondents were asked if they had any further

comments to make. Of interest, a few said they would like another 'Hippo' and may be prepared to pay for it. Others suggested that the device should be produced in a range of sizes, which ties in with some of the earlier findings.

### **3.2 Reactions to the information pack and attitudes to conservation**

Almost without exception, customers stressed the importance of Thames Water actively promoting water conservation in the home.

Encouragingly, the overwhelming majority of customers (89%) supported Thames Water's decision to offer the device to all customers, as a way of promoting water conservation in the home. This was despite any problems or difficulties customers may have experienced with the device.

Just over 75% of customers recalled the water conservation leaflet when prompted about this. Approximately half of such customers had retained the leaflet, which represents 40% of all customers surveyed. The results seem to suggest that the 'Hippo' information pack is an effective way of getting the water conservation message across to customers.

Of those recalling the leaflet, 75% found it "very" or "quite" useful, with about half of such customers passing information onto neighbours or friends.

In reality, only 25% of customers recalling the leaflet said that they had actively followed the advice in the leaflet. This equates to some 20% of all those customers surveyed. Most people (68%) reported that they were already taking such measures to conserve water in the house before receiving it.

Whether as a result of the advice contained in the leaflet or not, almost all respondents claimed that they actively took a range of measures to conserve water. As a group, the customers surveyed demonstrated high level of commitment to water conservation in the home. As might be expected, the more common sense measures were universally adopted by customers.

Of those customers with a water meter fitted, only 35% felt the device may have saved them money on their water bills, the majority finding it impossible to quantify the amount.

### **3.3 Attitudes to the name 'Hippo'**

The majority of respondents (70%) thought the name 'Hippo' to be "very" or "quite" appropriate. Reservations were, however, expressed by a significant minority about the appropriateness of the name. These people reported, in the main, that the name simply did not have any associations with water

conservation. It is difficult to quantify the strength of feeling surrounding this area , although it is interesting to note that only five people considered the name to be “stupid/silly”.

Other criticisms of the name were the fact that it did not describe the device, a suggestion being that it should simply be called a water saving device. There was also an implication that the ‘Hippo’ branding raises certain expectations when sending off for a device, when in fact it is simply a plastic bag that is not even Hippo shaped.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

The research suggests widespread support for the introduction of the ‘Hippo’ device across the Thames Water region. It is evident that customers welcome the promotion of water conservation in the home by Thames Water and that the ‘Hippo information pack is seen as relevant and useful in this context.

The majority of customers successfully fitted the device and are largely satisfied with its performance over an extended trial period. Nevertheless, some question marks were raised about the device. Just over a third of those who attempted to fit the device (irrespective of whether they were successful or not) reported problems with the ‘Hippo’ at some point. It is suggested that more comprehensive instructions and an explanation of potential problems in use may partly address this issue.

The ‘Hippo’ branding was largely supported although a significant minority did have reservations about this.