

Sustainability in the Workplace

ERC Survey Briefing - October 2009

Overview

One of the most common ways organizations are engaging in sustainability is striving to limit their negative impact on the environment by instituting green practices within their organizations. In October of 2009, ERC conducted a survey on organizations in Northeast Ohio to determine the ways in which local employers are engaging in "green" workplace and business practices that are environmentally-friendly and encourage sustainability. This report summarizes those results.

Key findings in the survey:

- The majority (82%) of employers are moderately or very interested in implementing and maintaining a sustainable workplace.
- Recycling and reusing supplies is the most common way that employers are conserving energy.
- Many organizations claim that they are integrating sustainability practices into their business operations, including products and services.
- The most predominant obstacle facing organizations when implementing sustainable workplace practices is the costs associated with doing so.

Energy Conservation

The majority of employers are either very interested or moderately interested in implementing and maintaining a sustainable and environmentally-responsible workplace. Those organizations reporting the highest level of interest were predominantly mid-size manufacturers.

Figure 1 | To what degree is your organization interested in implementing and maintaining a sustainable and environmentally-responsible workplace?

	Percent
Very interested	49%
Moderately interested	33%
Somewhat interested	16%
Slightly interested	2%
Not at all interested	0%

One-third of respondents have an energy policy in place. It appears, however, that the majority of employers have not created any formal policies related to energy conservation in their workplaces.

Figure 2 | Does your organization have an energy policy?

	Percent
Yes	33%
No	67%

Many employers are proactively conserving energy in their workplaces. The most common ways they are conserving is via recycling and re-using supplies, using paper-free systems, reducing printing, and controlling temperature. Some employers are also modifying lighting systems, purchasing energy-efficient appliances, evaluating/monitoring energy consumption, and making energy-efficient

improvements to their workplaces. Fewer employers are decreasing water usage, encouraging/incenting use of alternative transportation, and providing alternative work arrangements to conserve energy.

Figure 3 | To conserve energy in your workplace, is your organization doing any of the following?

	Currently doing	Considering doing	Not considering doing
Recycling and re-using supplies (paper, plastic, cardboard, aluminum, etc.)	96%	2%	2%
Using paper-free systems (electronic documents, faxes, and scanning)	86%	11%	2%
Reducing printing (double-sided printing, using multiple computer monitors, etc.)	85%	10%	5%
Controlling temperature	76%	17%	7%
Unplugging or turning off computers and/or other business equipment	58%	23%	19%
Modifying lighting system (using compact fluorescent lighting, task lighting, etc.)	58%	28%	14%
Purchasing energy-efficient appliances and equipment	56%	28%	15%
Evaluating or monitoring energy consumption/performing an energy audit	54%	28%	19%
Using videoconferencing equipment to eliminate need for travel	44%	16%	40%
Installing automatic lighting or other energy controls	39%	29%	32%
Making energy-efficient improvements to windows, doors, and/or insulation	38%	35%	28%
Converting to energy-efficient fuel (natural gas, electric)	35%	22%	43%
Decreasing water usage (installing motion sensors, using low-flow sinks and toilets, etc.)	28%	25%	48%
Encouraging/incentivizing use of public transport, carpooling, and bicycling/walking	23%	20%	58%
Providing alternative work arrangements (telecommuting, compressed work weeks)	20%	23%	58%

Business Practices

Some employers (17%) are building, operating, and remodeling their buildings in accordance with sustainability standards such as Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED); however the majority of respondents have not done so.

Figure 4 | Does your organization build, operate, and remodel its buildings in accordance with sustainability standards, such as Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED), from the U.S. Green Building Council?

	Percent
Yes	17%
No	83%

The majority of employers are incorporating a variety of sustainability initiatives into their business operations, products, and services. In fact, most employers are at least sometimes developing sustainable products or services, considering sustainability in the purchasing of materials and/or supplies, investigating other sustainable resources to be used, using environmentally-friendly or recycled materials when conducting business, recycling materials properly and reusing them, and minimizing pollution and emissions.

Figure 5 | To what extent does your organization do the following in its business operations

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Develops sustainable products or services					
	24%	24%	30%	6%	15%
Considers environmental sustainability in the purchasing of materials and/or supplies					
	17%	28%	42%	8%	6%

Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Investigates other sustainable resources to be used at an equal price and value				
17%	40%	34%	6%	3%
Uses environmentally-friendly or recycled materials when conducting business				
16%	50%	34%	0%	0%
Recycles materials properly and reuses them if possible				
34%	49%	17%	0%	0%
Minimizes pollution/emissions				
36%	31%	28%	3%	3%

Sustainability Programs & Initiatives

Nearly a third (32%) of employers provide education and training to employees regarding sustainable business practices.

Figure 6 | Does your organization provide education and training to employees regarding sustainable business practices?

	Percent
Yes	32%
No	68%

Operations, employee committees/task forces, and top management/CEOs are the most common individuals or groups that manage, initiate, or administer the organization's sustainability efforts. Other individuals or functions cited by organizations include Safety Director, Industrial Engineer, Marketing Sustainability Manager, and Facilities.

Figure 7 | Who manages, initiates, or administers your organization's sustainability efforts?

	Percent
Operations	36%
Employee committee/task force	33%
Top management and CEO	33%
Human resources	21%
Specific position (i.e. Environmental Coordinator, etc.)	15%
Administration	13%
No one designated	7%

Sustainability efforts reap many positive effects for employers, ranging from the obvious - less negative impact on the environment - to enhanced employee and customer satisfaction. In addition, the majority of employers also revealed that sustainability efforts have lowered operating costs in their businesses.

Among employers who reported lower operating costs as a result of their efforts, these were their most common "green" practices:

- Using paper-free systems (100%)
- Recycling and reusing supplies (96%)
- Reducing printing (82%)
- Controlling temperature (81%)
- Purchasing energy efficient appliances and equipment (73%)

Figure 8 | What positive effects has your organization seen from its sustainability efforts?

	Percent
Less negative impact on the environment	78%
Reduced operating costs	62%
Enhanced employee satisfaction	54%
Healthier and safer workplace	51%
Improved reputation and public image	32%
Enhanced customer satisfaction	24%
Competitive advantage	14%

Many employers face obstacles in implementing sustainable business and workplace practices, predominantly barriers related to the costs associated with implementing and maintaining programs. In addition, some organizations report having difficulty measuring outcomes and assessing the financial impact of their practices. Still others feel they lack knowledge or expertise on the subject matter. Another barrier cited by respondents includes not having enough recycled material to meet demand.

Figure 9 | What obstacles does your organization face in implementing sustainable business and workplace practices?

	Percent
Costs associated with implementing and maintaining programs	68%
Difficulty in measuring outcomes or assessing financial impact	43%
Lack of knowledge or expertise in organization regarding best practices in sustainability	32%
Perceived to have minimal value on workplace or business	22%
Lack of employee support	19%
Lack of leadership or management support	14%

Organizations cite that the factors in their business or workplace affecting their ability to build an effective sustainability program are identifying alternative "green" products that are as cost-competitive and effective as other materials, current requirements on the materials used for end product, time, costs, lack of employee interest, and lease/building constraints.

Respondent Demographics

Figure 10 | Respondent demographics by industry and organizational size

Number of organizations	45
Industry	
Manufacturing	58%
Non-Manufacturing	16%
Non-Profit	26%
Organizational size	
1-50	11%
51-200	66%
201-500	16%
501+	8%

About ERC

ERC is Northeast Ohio's largest organization dedicated to HR and workplace programs, practices, training and consulting. ERC membership provides employers access to an incredible amount of information, expertise, and cost savings that supports the attraction, retention, and development of great employees. We also host the nationally recognized NorthCoast 99 program and sponsor the ERC Health insurance program. For more information about ERC, please visit www.ercnet.org.