



Published on GreenBizSite (<http://www.greenbiz.com>)

Companies Cite Growing Interest, Need and Value for Environmental Smarts: Survey

By GreenBiz Staff
March 19, 2009

Businesses have a growing interest and need for environmental and sustainability knowledge -- so much so that 65 percent say they value such knowledge in job candidates and 78 percent say that value will appreciate as a hiring factor in the next five years, according to a survey by the National Environmental Education Foundation.

The points are among the results of research detailed in a 50-page report called "The Engaged Organization, Corporate Employee Environmental Education Survey and Case Study Findings" (pdf). The report was released Wednesday in Washington, D.C.

Researchers working on behalf of the foundation surveyed 1,354 people last May. About 87 percent were working at companies, almost 7 percent were consultants, 4.3 percent came from government organizations, 1.5 percent worked at NGOs and two-tenths of a percent hailed from academia.

Those in business drew from 20 industry sectors. The greatest number of business respondents worked in consumer goods, some 19 percent, with energy taking second place at 12 percent. In terms of size, 40 percent were from small companies, those with 99 or fewer employees; 40 percent were from medium-sized companies, with 100 to 9,999 employees; and 20 percent were from large firms of 10,000 people or more. (Disclosure: The report noted that most of the non-business and small-business respondents are from the mailing list for GreenBuzz, the weekly e-newsletter for GreenBiz.com, and the Co-op America mailing list.)

Seventy percent of respondents said their firms educate employees about corporate environmental and sustainability goals, and 56 percent said they consider their programs advanced or very advanced.

Of those at firms with no environmental education programs in place, 49 percent said they believe their companies will start something in the next two years and about 41 percent were unsure.

Just under 10 percent said they do not expect their firms to initiate a program; the reasons they cited included competing priorities, lack of time and lack of goals. Hurdles and other challenges cited elsewhere in the survey included lack of money and resources, lack of executive support and need for culture change within the company.

Researchers' work included case studies of environmental and sustainability education efforts

at Cisco, Hewlett-Packard, Interface Flooring Systems Inc., Johnson & Johnson, Wal-Mart, Stonyfield, The Accessory Corporation and Clean Clothes Inc. as well as briefs about work at Ikea and BT.

Three of the firms -- Cisco, Interface and Johnson & Johnson -- highlighted their environmental education programs in a webcast briefing about the report on Wednesday. Common aspects among the presentations included the underlying belief that responsibility for sustainability should be integrated throughout a company at every level and for every position, and that engaged employees are not only more productive, they also can produce valuable cost-savings solutions.

An example cited involved a Wal-Mart employee whose suggestion to reduce interior display lights in vending machines led to a \$1 million cost savings. Similar efficiency initiatives and programs to reduce waste and increase recycling are among the more effective programs that stimulate employee involvement and learning, presenters said.

Innovations discussed included Cisco Green, a robust one-stop intranet portal for employees seeking information on all things green; Interface's recent soft-launch of missionzero.org, which is designed to be an information-rich employee forum as well as a resource that connects the company with the larger community; and Johnson & Johnson's strategies for engaging the 120 companies of the highly decentralized organization.

In commissioning the survey and studies, NEEF sought to learn about corporate perceptions and practices regarding environmental education in business. There was a general sense that the concept was valued, but there was no hard data to show how much, by whom and whether knowledge of the environment and sustainability was affecting the corporate bottom line.

"We truly did not know what we were going to find," NEEF President Diane Wood said during the briefing. "We really had no idea how much environmental education is taking place."

In addition to confirming that companies consider such knowledge valuable, key findings of the survey and case studies include:

- Environmentally educated employees can help improve a business' bottom line.
- Companies of all sizes have implemented environmental education programs.
- There is no one-size-fits-all format for education programs.
- The economy is changing; companies that educate employees about environmental issues now position themselves to be more competitive in the future.
- And in the future, all jobs will be green jobs.

Wood said research also showed there is an "incredible commitment sharing" information about experiences and best practices as well as a desire for a forum in which to do so. To that end, she said, NEEF is exploring the idea of setting up a business sustainability education roundtable.

Wood also noted that while anecdotal information about program outcomes can be inspiring, it is essential to establish metrics. "Environmental education is important but it's also important

not to go in to this romantically," she said. "You have to measure."

Christopher Spain, the chairman and chief strategy officer of HydroPoint Data Systems Inc., put it this way in remarks quoted in the report:

"Corporate environmental education and sustainability programs are frequently launched with great enthusiasm yet often lack structure, quantifiable cost savings and accountability to guarantee success. Programs fizzle when they do not gain executive sponsorship or gather user feedback, interaction and participation from employees and customers alike. NEEF's efforts to inform companies of the importance of aligning sustainability programs and efforts with business goals will prove crucial in reaching corporate triple bottom line objectives."

Image CC licensed by Flickr user [nick kulas](#).

Source URL: <http://www.greenbiz.com/news/2009/03/19/companies-value-environmental-smarts>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.neefusa.org/>
- [2] http://www.neefusa.org/BusinessEnv/EngagedOrganization_03182009.pdf
- [3] <http://www.greenbiz.com/enewsletter>
- [4] <http://www.greenbiz.com>
- [5] <http://www.cisco.com/>
- [6] <http://www.hp.com/>
- [7] <http://www.interfaceglobal.com/>
- [8] <http://www.jnj.com/connect/>
- [9] <http://walmartstores.com/>
- [10] <http://www.stonyfield.com/>
- [11] <http://www.theaccessorycorp.com/index fla.htm>
- [12] <http://www.maggiesorganics.com/maggiesstory.php>
- [13] <http://www.ikea.com/>
- [14] <http://www.btplc.com/index.cfm>
- [15] <http://missionzero.org/>
- [16] <http://www.hydropoint.com/index.php>
- [17] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/86918499@N00/1182550475/>