

# How green are we anyway?

Insync Surveys asks over 14,000 survey  
respondents how green their employers are

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## Education and age affect expectations of employer environmental performance, but bosses would be unwise to ignore their scorecard from staff.

You'd be crazy not to look in the mirror before going out, and organisations are no different. Before seeking new clients and staff, smart organisations look in the mirror with a staff survey. Some get great confidence from what they see, others realise they're unkempt. Many also ask themselves if the mirror is telling lies.

Increasingly, all types of organisations are realising that "looking good" in the market place includes being environmentally responsible, which is why Insync Surveys asks this question in some of its surveys. The answers reveal that the mirror can lie. Bosses should pay careful attention to images of themselves.

### **What your people think of your environmental performance is important for a number of reasons:**

- enhanced environmental performance is associated with increased employee commitment
- environmental issues are becoming more important to people and influence their buying decisions
- employees adopt employer branding and they are an important way of winning new clients
- potential new employees take a company's environmental performance into account and often ask current employees for their opinion
- employee actions determine your environmental performance and understanding how they feel is often the first step to meeting their expectations

To find out just how good the mirror is, Insync Surveys selected a representative group of over 14,000 staff from the three quarters of a million responses in its benchmark databases. These staff came from all types of organisations, large and small, government, not-for-profit and corporate. The responses included those of a rubbish collector and a Nobel Prize winner, and everybody in between. Refer to Table 1 below for more information on the sample group.

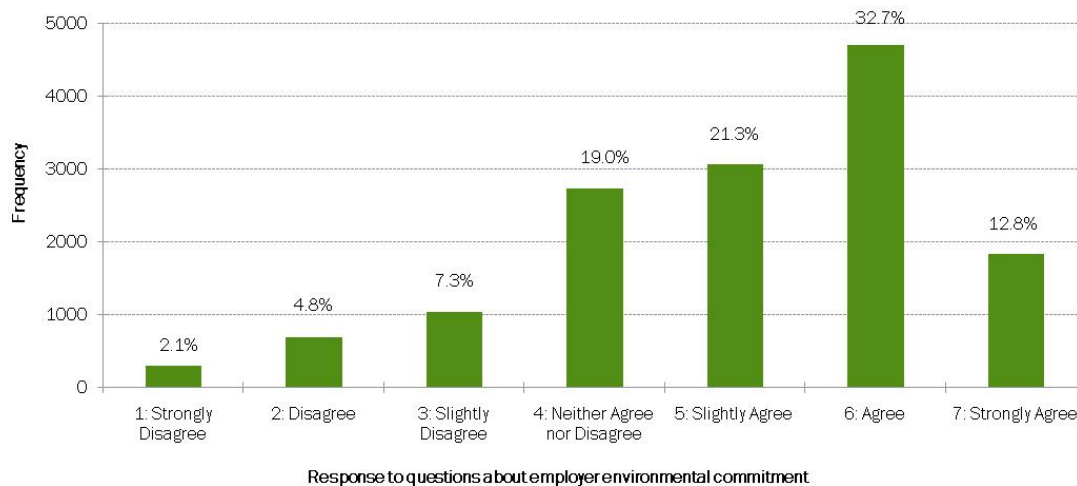
**Table 1: Descriptive data (where stated)**

	N	%	Mean response on seven point Likert scale
<b>Overall</b>	14,409	100	5.02
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	7,818	57.34%	5.068
Male	5,816	42.66%	5.014
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,634</b>	100%	
<b>Age</b>			
<25	1,213	9.18%	5.065
25-34	3,663	27.72%	4.865
35-44	3,662	27.71%	4.911
45-54	3,273	24.77%	5.097
>55	1,403	10.62%	5.296
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13,214</b>	100%	
<b>Company Size</b>			
<100	1,081	7.50%	4.81
100-1000	6,952	48.25%	5.01
>1000	6,376	44.25%	5.06
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,409</b>	100%	

Insync Surveys then analysed the responses to find out what effect age, gender, tenure, education and size of organisation might have on employee opinions. Its findings provide insight for all employers about how to better understand, manage, meet and leverage employee perceptions of their commitment to the environment.

**Table 2: Response frequencies**

Insync Surveys asked participants to respond on a one to seven scale to the statement: “Our organisation is committed to the environment.”



### Age

The subjects were broken up into five groups according to age group. The group with the lowest expectations of their employers’ environmental performance were those greater than 54 years old. It was 25-34 year olds who were the most critical of their employers’ environmental performance, more critical even than the younger generation Y employees. Age had the biggest effect on response to the survey statement and all organisations would be wise to realise that a workforce dominated by 25-34 year olds will hold them to a higher standard of environmental performance.

### Education

Respondents were broken down into nine groups. The analysis was performed on those professionals in jobs requiring a degree against others. It was found that people in jobs requiring a university degree were more critical than others in their assessment of their employers’ environmental performance. Therefore professional services firms which are dominated by people with degrees are held to higher environmental standards by their staff than manufacturing organisations which have a lower proportion of tertiary educated people.

**Table 3: Education breakdown**

Education types	N	Mean
Professional	3875	4.84
Skilled	3322	5.25

### Gender

Research into business and social ethics has produced mixed findings about whether women have higher standards than men. This study found men to have higher environmental expectations than women. The finding was statistically significant but the difference was small.

Tenure and seniority were also tested. No effect was found between these two factors and employee perceptions of their employer’s commitment to the environment.

**Table 4: Summary of results**

Factor (demographic)	Size of effect (from largest to smallest)	Comment
Age	Small to medium	25-34 year olds most critical, >54 year olds least critical of employer commitment to the environment
Education/profession	Small to medium	Professionals more critical than people in roles not requiring tertiary qualifications
Size of organisation	Small to medium	People in small organisations more critical
Gender	Very small	Women less critical

### Size of organisation

The sample was broken down into three groups, those from organisations of less than 100 employees, 100–1000 and over 1000. Organisations with 100–1000 people had roughly the same perspective on their employers’ commitment to the environment as people from very large organisations. However people in smaller organisations, less than 100 employees, were more critical than the other groups of their employers’ environmental performance.



### Three reasons bosses need to listen

Organisations should pay attention to their employees' opinions because in this study a strong positive correlation was observed between employees who thought their employer was environmentally responsible and employees who were committed and satisfied with their jobs.

Secondly, should bosses just ignore what they're hearing from their people? They can if they want, but it would be unwise to do so. A study was performed<sup>1</sup> where two almost identical employment brochures were given to a group of university students. The only difference between the two brochures was that one highlighted the environmental credentials of the prospective employer and the other didn't. Students were then asked whether or not they would be inclined to apply for a job with the company that had been described in the brochure. Significantly more students were interested in working for the company with the environmental credentials.

When environmental credentials of applicants were then analysed, their increased likelihood of applying for a job was not solely related to the environmental ethics of the applicant. This means that being an environmentally sound company won't just stack your candidate pool with Greenies, it will stack your candidate pool with all types of people because environmental commitment is a recognised part of corporate social responsibility, which has been related in many studies to increased application rates and higher employee commitment.

The third reason why employers should listen to the messages from their staff is an issue of risk and reputation. Policies and practices that may harm the organisation's reputation and financial status may be hidden from senior management and directors. Staff surveys are a great way for organisations to equip themselves with the right questions to ask. Think of Union Carbide and the Bhopal Disaster, BHP and Ok Tedi, Shell and Brent Spar, Hooker Chemical and Love Canal, or the Pacific Gas and Electric Company/Erin Brockovich story. These are examples of companies that have suffered very significant reputational damage as a result of poor environmental stewardship. If they had listened to their employees the problems may never have existed.

In an environment of heightened awareness about water, carbon, climate change, air quality and pollution, corporate social responsibility and environmental responsibility will remain strong factors in an organisation's value proposition to employees. Improving environmental responsibility helps to attract and retain a skilled workforce. In an environment of low unemployment the importance of these issues is paramount.

Promoting environmental efforts will become increasingly important to attract and retain employees and customers. The imminent retirement of the Baby Boomers, the group with the

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<sup>1</sup> Insync Surveys can provide details of any other studies mentioned on request

lowest expectations of their employer with regard to the environment, means the issue will become more important to the majority of employees. This is because as baby boomers retire, generation Y enter. Generation Y have a higher tendency to change jobs and they hold employers to high standards in terms of development opportunities and their relationship with society.

To summarise, the mirror might not be a perfect reflection of an organisation's performance, but the world sees the mirror more often than they see what an organisation is really like. Improve your organisation's value proposition and bottom line by going green.

### **About Insync Surveys**

Insync Surveys is a 2009 *BRW* Fast 100 company. With offices in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, we deliver customer, employee, board and other stakeholder surveys for some of the largest organisations in Asia Pacific, including: Cathay Pacific, Foster's, Toll, AXA, Medibank Private, WorleyParsons, the New South Wales Department of Community Services, the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, Tourism Western Australia, iiNet, Fairfax Digital, QLD Department of Emergency Services, TT-Line (Spirit of Tasmania), Melbourne Cricket Club, many local councils, most university libraries and Mission Australia. This experience allows us to benchmark your results. Insync Surveys' organisational psychologists help your organisation to improve performance and the working lives of your people.

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