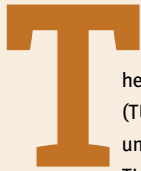


DO TRADE UNIONS REALLY CARE ABOUT
THE ENVIRONMENT?



The Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee (TUSDAC) is the government’s main contact point with the trade union movement on environmental issues. In May and June 2004 TUSDAC conducted an on-line environment survey to explore the interest and involvement of trade union members and representatives in environmental issues, both on a personal level and in the workplace.

There were 310 responses to the survey, covering eleven of the UK’s largest trade unions – accounting for 4.75 million members. Seventy per cent of respondents were male and 92% were employed full-time. Seventeen per cent were aged 21-30 and a further 31% were in the 31-40 age range.

PERSONAL VIEWS AND ACTION

Respondents were asked for their views on a range of environmental issues, and these are summarised in the table below.

	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
The government should be doing more to combat global warming	95%	4%
There is nothing much that I can do to improve the environment	7%	92%
Green pressure groups are doing a good job in raising environmental awareness	76%	25%
Companies can be trusted to take care of the environment	3%	95%
I am mainly concerned about the quality of my local environment	30%	69%
Trade unions should be doing more to protect the environment	82%	14%
Environmental issues are mainly of concern to young people	9%	90%
I would support environmental measures in my workplace	99%	1%
I am concerned that environmental policies could lead to job losses	17%	81%
Union representatives should carry out environmental audits	66%	32%
There is not much the government can do without better international co-operation	30%	70%
Environmental damage is the unavoidable price of economic success	15%	84%

The strength of support for further action on environmental issues by government and trade unions is striking, as is the overwhelming support for environmental measures in the workplace. Women and respondents at either end of the age spectrum (21-30 and over 60) had the most strongly held views. These responses also refute the view that individual action makes no difference, and two thirds of respondents support a practical role for unions in undertaking environmental audits.

The youngest group of respondents were slightly less likely to agree (67%) than others that green pressure groups are doing a good job in raising environmental awareness, but also less likely to see the environment as a trade union issue (76%).

Male respondents (23%) were more concerned than women (5%) about the effects of environmental policies on employment, perhaps reflecting occupational gender segregation. Respondents aged 41-50 were more than twice as likely to be concerned (27%) than those under 40 (12%).

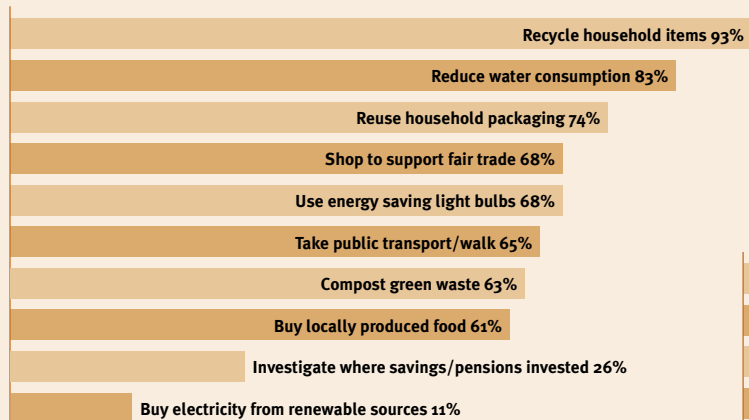
The chart (right) shows the actions taken personally by respondents.

The three most popular actions are recycling household items, reducing water consumption, and reusing household packaging. Only a small minority of respondents bought electricity generated from renewable sources and just one quarter investigated where their savings and/or pension are invested.

Women were more likely than men to shop to support fair trade (75%), though the most committed fair trade shoppers were those over 60. Younger respondents were more likely than others to try and reduce water consumption (90%) and to use energy saving

DO TRADE UNIONS
THE

Personal Action



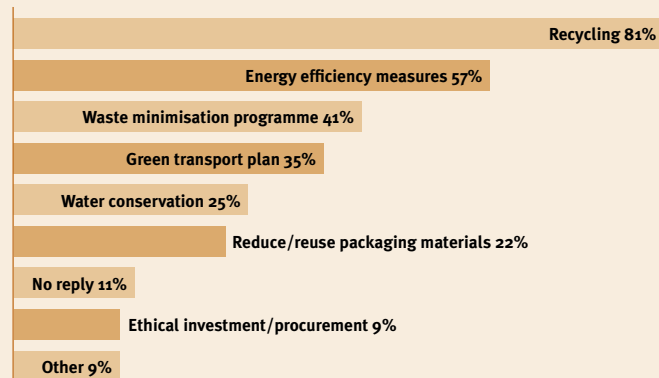
light bulbs (74%). Half of respondents aged over 60 said that they investigated where their savings and/or pension were invested, compared with 20% of respondents under 40 and 30% in the 40-60 age range.

The key barriers to personal environmental action were quality of information (47%), lack of time (34%), and extra cost (26%). Over half of females (54%) and younger respondents (55%) said that they needed better information. Cost was a more significant barrier at ages 21-30 and 41-50 (around 30%). Respondents over 40 were also less convinced that their own actions would make any difference.

THE WORKPLACE

Just over half the respondents (51%) did not know whether their employer produced an annual environmental report, while 28% of respondents said their employer did and 21% said they did not. Women were less likely to know than men

Employers' Action



(63%), as were younger respondents (73%). Respondents were asked about the environmental actions taken by their employer. The three most common reported actions are recycling, energy efficiency measures and waste minimisation programmes (see chart below).

UNION INVOLVEMENT

Just 8% of respondents reported that their union branch had an environmental representative, and 7% said that the environmental role is combined with health and safety. However, 65% did not know if there was a branch environmental representative and 19% said that there was not. Women were less likely to know the position (72%) than men (63%). A much higher proportion (92%) of those aged 21-30 did not know whether there was an environmental rep.

There was a similar lack of awareness about the role of environmental issues on the bargaining agenda. Just 5%

REALLY CARE ABOUT ENVIRONMENT?

of respondents said that environmental issues were part of the local bargaining agenda and 4% that this was part of the national bargaining agenda. Sixty-nine per cent were unaware of the position at local level and almost three-quarters (72%) did not know whether there was company or national level bargaining on these issues. Again, women and younger respondents showed the lowest levels of awareness.

DEFINING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Respondents were asked to indicate what sustainable development means to them. The selection of responses given below illustrates the diversity and challenges in taking this agenda forward.

“Investment in the future of our planet and ourselves.”

“Sustainable development should mean continued technological and scientific advance coupled with a responsible attitude to not poisoning future generations.”

“Maintaining economic progress whilst protecting the quality of life locally and globally.”

“A healthier people and planet and workplace.”

“Absolutely nothing – I have heard so many definitions I have come to the conclusion it’s a trendy soundbite.”

“Leaving the environment in at least as good shape for my children as I inherited it from my parents.”

“Ultimately, a low standard of living.”

“Reduce, reuse and recycle.”

“Taking sensible measures to protect the environment in a balanced way, making progress through well thought-out legislation and good science.”

NEXT STEPS

The results of this survey will be reported to the Environment Minister and the TUC and taken into account in TUSDAC’s work, including:

- environment courses for union representatives
- responses to government policies, for example on climate change
- joint initiatives with employers
- development of a trade union sustainable development strategy.

There is further information on the TUSDAC and TUC websites: www.defra.gov.uk/environment/tusdac/index.htm or www.sustainableworkplace.co.uk

If you would like to know more about TUSDAC or find out how you and your union can get more involved, contact your union’s headquarters or the TUC’s Economic and Social Affairs Department.



Prospect

Prospect House, 75-79 York Road,
London SE1 7AQ
T 020 7902 6600 F 020 7902 6667
E enquiries@prospect.org.uk

www.prospect.org.uk