

SME-nvironment 2005: Northern Ireland

Key findings

- Overwhelmingly 85% of businesses in Northern Ireland requested the same amount, if not more support from the Government and its agencies to deal with environmental issues.
- When compared with the rest of UK, businesses in Northern Ireland were least likely to consider that their activities could cause harm to the environment.
- There was a low level of awareness of environmental legislation with only 12% of Northern Ireland businesses being able to name a piece of legislation. This is similar to the UK average.
- Businesses in Northern Ireland were most likely to be planning to implement an EMS in the future. This has increased by 5% from 0.1% in 2003.
- Businesses in Northern Ireland find the most useful source of environmental information is the Local Authority followed by the Environment and Heritage Service (EHS) and the waste management contractor.
- There was a low level of awareness of the NetRegs website across the UK (6%) and, especially in Northern Ireland (5%). However since 2003 there has been a 1% increase in the percentage of businesses who have heard of the NetRegs website. Almost half of respondents (48%) stated that they would find the website useful and this is an increase of 6% on 2003.

- Overall, levels of environmental awareness and activity among SMEs across the UK were low, particularly among micro SMEs (0-9 employees).

Introduction

The 2005 NetRegs Survey of Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SME) awareness was conducted using a random sample of SMEs across the UK in 15 business sectors. The sample was stratified by region, business sector and size of business. Response to the survey was good and out of 5,554 telephone interviews, a total of 1,202 (22%) were achieved in Northern Ireland. A summary of the key findings from the surveys undertaken in Northern Ireland is presented below.

Activities harmful to the environment

When unprompted, only 4% of Northern Ireland businesses thought that they undertook any activity that could cause harm to the environment. When prompted with a list of activities that are potentially harmful, 35% of Northern Ireland businesses stated that they undertook at least one of them. This is lower than the UK average (41%) but an increase of 20% on 2003 when only 15% of businesses in Northern Ireland thought that they carried out any such activity when prompted.

The activities that businesses in Northern Ireland were most likely to undertake were:

1. storing chemicals, fuel or oils
2. anything that would cause a local nuisance
3. produce or import packaging

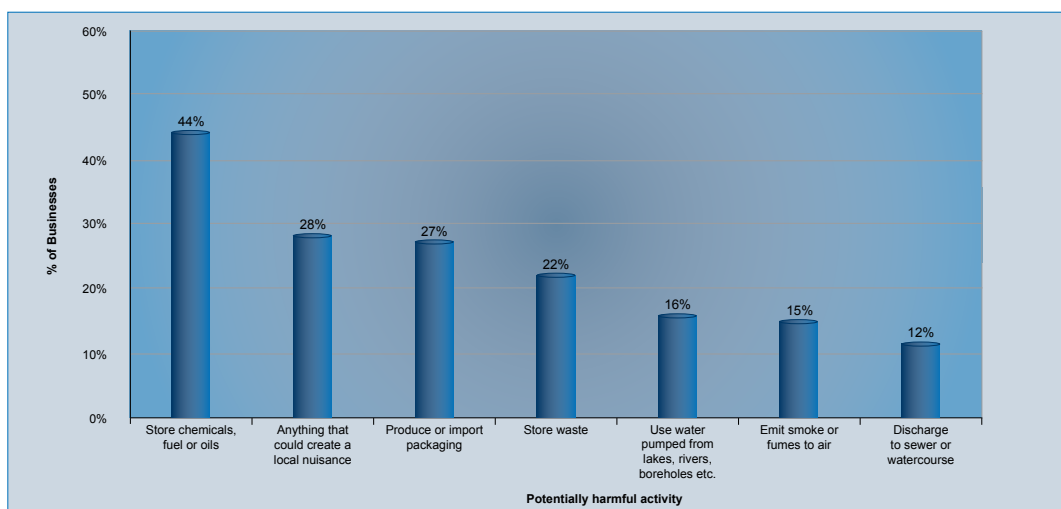


Figure 1
Potentially harmful activities undertaken by businesses in Northern Ireland (prompted)

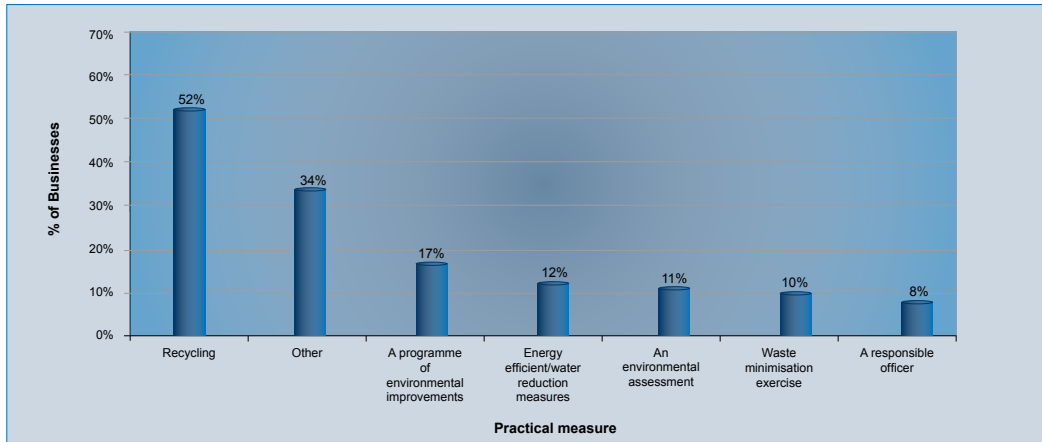


Figure 2
Practical measures undertaken by businesses in Northern Ireland (unprompted)

Of those businesses who mentioned storing chemicals, fuels or oils, 15% stated that they had banded an oil tank or chemical store. This is not required by law in Northern Ireland but is recognised as good environmental practice. Figure 1 illustrates the findings.

Measures to address environmental issues

A quarter of Northern Ireland businesses in the survey stated that they had introduced practical measures to reduce environmental harm. This is slightly lower than the average for the UK of 31%. Amongst Northern Ireland businesses, between 2003 and 2005 there has been an increase in the percentage of businesses who have introduced a practical measure (+1%), from 24% to 25%.

Of those who had introduced practical measures to reduce environmental harm, the measure most frequently cited was recycling (52%). Seventeen percent of businesses in Northern Ireland stated that they had implemented a programme of environmental improvements and 12% mentioned implementing energy efficiency or water reduction improvements.

Legislation	% of Respondents
Waste management licensing regulations	34
Pollution prevention and control regulations	32
Duty of care regulations	28
Packaging waste regulations	28
Draft hazardous waste regulations	25
Water resources act 1991	25
End of life vehicles regulations 2003	20
Environmental liability directive 2004	16

Table 1 - Level of awareness of legislation (prompted) (multiple response allowed)

Environmental policy and Environmental Management Systems (EMS)

Businesses in Northern Ireland were the most likely to have plans to introduce an Environmental Management System (EMS) in the future (Northern Ireland - 5%; Scotland - 2%; England - 1%; Wales - 1%). There was an increase in the number of Northern Ireland businesses with an EMS in place between 2003 and 2005 of 2%, up from 17 businesses to 70. Equally, the biggest change in businesses that have plans to introduce an EMS in the future was in Northern Ireland with an increase of 5% on 2003.

Less than a fifth (17%) of Northern Ireland businesses had an environmental policy. This is lower than the UK average of 25%. Of those businesses that did have an environmental policy in place, over half (51%) had it as an informal management aim.

Reasons for addressing environmental issues

Almost two-thirds of Northern Ireland businesses (65%) who had taken some action to address their environmental performance stated that they were influenced by a general concern for the environment. Other influences mentioned were the need to comply with legislation (23%) and to reduce costs (15%). These were also the three main drivers for businesses in England, Scotland and Wales.

Both a general concern for the environment and the need to comply with legislation were the two main drivers for change in 2003 as well as in 2005.

Nine percent of businesses based in Northern Ireland were involved in a business forum that discussed environmental issues.



Environmental awareness

There was a low level of legislative awareness, with only 12% of businesses in Northern Ireland able to name a piece of environmental legislation unprompted. This is slightly lower than the UK average (14%).

All businesses were then prompted with a list of eight pieces of legislation and asked if they had heard of any of them. Sixty-two percent of all Northern Ireland businesses had heard of at least one of the eight pieces of legislation which is similar to the UK average (64%). Notably, businesses in Northern Ireland were most likely to be able to name the Waste Management Licensing Regulations.

The Waste Management Licensing Regulations (34%) and the Pollution Prevention and Control Regulations (32%) were the most widely recognised pieces of legislation in Northern Ireland.

Benefits in addressing environmental issues

Businesses considered that the three main business benefits of addressing environmental issues were

- a reduced risk of prosecution (80% strongly agree/agree),
- creating good relations with customers (75% strongly agree/agree)
- reduced operating costs (69% strongly agree/agree).

These were also the top three perceived benefits across the UK.

In both 2003 and 2005 Northern Ireland businesses felt that the strongest links existed between environmental good practice and the reduced risk of prosecution, creates good relations with customers and reduces operating costs.

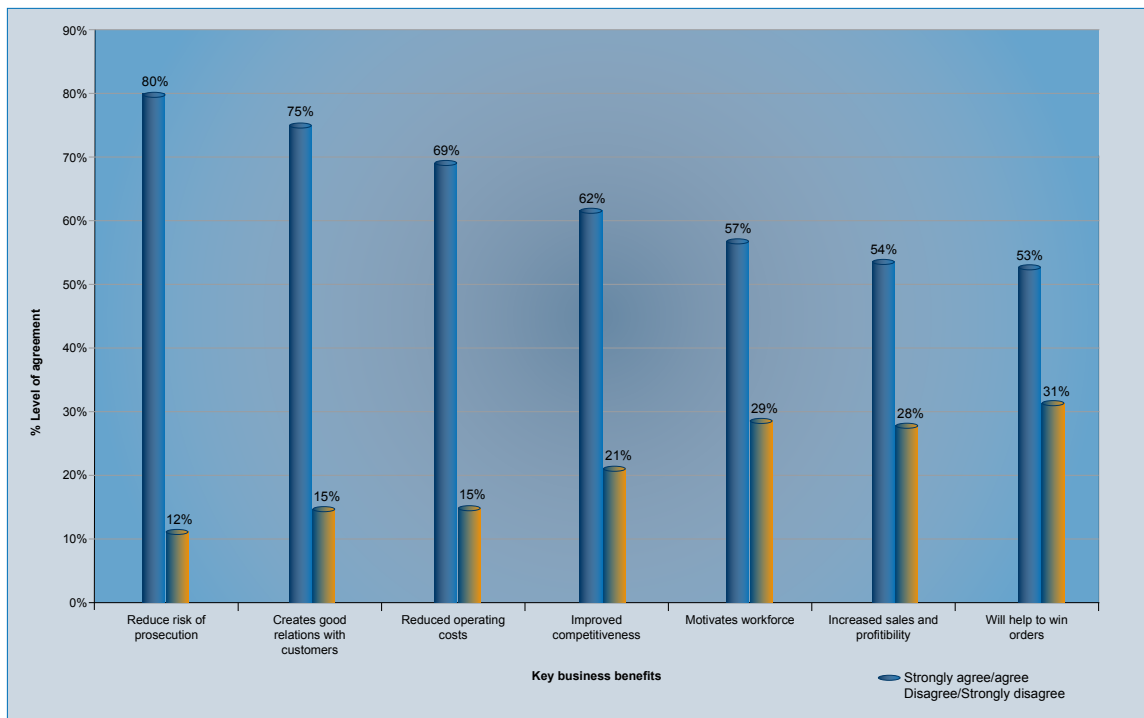


Figure 3
Perceived business benefits of good environmental practice

NetRegs website

Five per cent of businesses in Northern Ireland had heard of the NetRegs website, this is slightly lower than the UK average of 6%. Between 2003 and 2005 the percentage of Northern Ireland businesses who had heard of the NetRegs website increased by 1%.

Encouragingly, in 2005 just under half of respondents in Northern Ireland (48%) stated that they would find the NetRegs website useful. There has also been a 6% increase between 2003 and 2005 in the percentage of businesses who would find the website useful in the future.

Sources of help

Businesses were asked which organisations (if any) they contacted on environmental matters. The survey found that businesses in Northern Ireland most often go to Local Authorities (58%), Waste Companies (39%) and the Environmental Regulator (35%) for environmental help and advice. Businesses in Northern Ireland found the Local Authority the most useful source of information; this was also the case for businesses in England and Wales.

Between 2003 and 2005 there has been no change in the organisations that Northern Ireland businesses are most likely to contact for environmental help and advice. In both 2003 and 2005 businesses in Northern Ireland found the Local Authority the most useful source of information on environmental issues.

Information requirements

Overwhelmingly 85% wanted the same amount if not more support from the Government and its agencies to deal with environmental issues. Half of businesses in Northern Ireland stated that they would prefer to receive information on environmental issues via printed materials, and 26% preferred the internet. This pattern of preference was found in the other UK countries.

The preferred method of receiving information on environmental issues was via printed materials; this was the case in both 2003 and 2005. However there has been a decrease in the percentage of Northern Ireland businesses preferring to receive information via printed materials and an increase in the percentage of businesses that would prefer to receive information via the internet between the two years.

**Protect your business.
Protect the environment.**

Visit: www.netregs.gov.uk



Environment
Agency
Asiantaeth yr
Amgylchedd



Environment &
Heritage Service
www.eh.sni.gov.uk



SEPA
Scottish Environment
Protection Agency