Wasteful workplaces: less than 1 in 5 professionals think their employer does enough to tackle climate change

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Only 14% of professionals in the UK think their employer is doing enough to help combat climate change.

Following Earth Day (April 22) – new research from specialist recruitment company Robert Walters has found that despite 48% of the companies surveyed stating they have clear, business-wide sustainability goals – efforts still seem to be falling short.

Chris Eldridge, CEO of Robert Walters UK comments: "All members of the business community have an obligation to help reverse the dial on climate change – in 2022, UK businesses contributed almost 19% of all carbon emissions in the country. So understandably there is a mounting responsibility on companies to look at reducing their footprint."

3 in 5 professionals feel that sustainability and climate considerations have moved up their agenda in the past 12 months – whilst only 22% of employers feel the same.

Clear climate goals?

Around 500 kilograms of office-related waste is generated annually by full-time employees in the UK (source).

What's worrying is that only 48% of UK professionals state their company has a set of clear, business-wide climate or sustainability targets – the remaining 52% state that their companies don't.

Chris comments: "Despite the almost equal split between those companies who have clear climate targets and those who don't – its important to note that a

strong environmental, sustainability stance can safeguard a company's long-term success and a strong ESG proposition is actually tied to higher equity returns."

Sustainable deception on the rise

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)'s have strengthened consumer protection laws to give UK authorities the power to place substantial fines on businesses found to be greenwashing – not only that, but the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) has introduced a new anti-greenwashing set for full implementation as of 31 May 2024 to clamp down on green claims.

In 2022 alone, research found that 60% of sustainability claims from 12 major UK brands were found to be unsubstantiated or misleading ([source](#)).

Chris comments: "As sustainability records and propositions continue to become part of organisations' commercial USP – so too will cases of greenwashing rise. That's why it's important for employers to be able to substantiate every single one of their climate claims."

How sustainable is your workplace?

Only 19% of respondents to the Robert Walters poll believe their workplace is sustainable – whilst the majority of over two-fifths state their workplace is only marginally and a further 39% don't think their workplace is at all sustainable.

Indeed, 50% of professionals think their employer increase efforts to tackle climate change through making their workplaces more sustainable – whilst 18% feel some efforts have been made.

Chris comments: "Should the onus for workplace sustainability fall exclusively on employers' shoulders? Or should there be more responsibility on professionals to come forward and join the efforts to ramp up office sustainability?"

Nitty-gritty of green efforts

In light of this year's Earth Day theme 'Plastic vs. Planet' – the Robert Walters poll asked professionals who they thought the responsibility to control plastic usage at work lay with – 32% stated senior company leaders, 21% opted for office managers – however, almost two-fifths said that the responsibility lay with employees themselves.

Recent government figures show that almost a fifth of all waste in the UK is generated by businesses – whether that be plastic waste, food wastage from corporate events; or paper and electronic waste.

Chris comments: "Physical waste is just the tip of the iceberg – there is also energy usage (lights, laptops, printers and other tech) and heating costs, to the Co2 production of long commutes and company travel abroad.

"Not only does office waste and energy usage carry huge environmental burden, but also a financial one that can have an enormous impact on a company's bottom line."

Chris Eldridge shares his top tips for sustainable business: "Almost half of professionals state that their organisation has clear climate goals – yet not even a fifth think their employer is actually doing enough to foster meaningful, long-term sustainability.

"There are a host of changes that can be adopted by businesses to become greener for good:

- Carrying out a waste audit – hiring an external provider to conduct a workplace waste audit, outlining areas for improvement and compiling an action plan of waste reduction.
- Assign responsibility in your organisation – an increasing number of ESG-related roles are being created in organisations to set climate targets and form initiatives to reach set goals.
- Partnering with an ESG consultancy – not only to help hold your company to account but to keep up with sustainable industry expectations as well as stay abreast of upcoming policy changes.
- Offering sustainable alternatives – from keep-cups to reduce single-use plastics, recycled notepads and materials – offering more sustainable alternatives is a sure fire way of reducing unnecessary business waste.
- Introduce collective sustainability incentives – work together as an organisation to decide sustainability incentives and goals, if everyone feels they have a hand in fostering greater sustainability across a business there will be more chance of it becoming a reality.