

World Wants More Legislation and Better Efforts from Industry

The wave of public concern about the environment that washed over North America and Europe 10 years ago is now crashing into Asia. Energizing the phenomenon are the beliefs that human health is at risk and is already being affected and that government and industry are not doing much — or at any rate, not enough — on behalf of the environment (see Figure 1). The findings are part of the largest survey ever conducted of public opinion on environmental attitudes around the world.

The fourth annual poll, by **Environics International** and its research partners in 34 countries on six continents, questioned a representative sample of 35,162 people (or about 1,000 citizens from each country). The interviews were conducted in person and over the phone. The results of *The Environmental Monitor 2000 International Report* are available to client subscribers as part of Envionics' strategic consulting services.

"The business environment in Asia is going to change a great deal over the next five years. The bottom-up pressure from the public is going to change laws. Governments are going to fall on this," says Envionics President **Doug Miller**. "There is going to be huge change across the region. And there are going to be huge opportunities. We are already helping some global companies gain access to China and other markets by showing that their products are better for the environment than the traditional products that they are using for basic household purposes and other things."

Another big shift, occurring in industrial and developing nations alike, is the fusion of attitudes people have as both consumers and private citizens. Their new aspirational agenda is to have it all — environmental protection will lead to a robust economy in a win-win situation — and they are looking for strong action in this direction, Miller tells *BATE*.

"Right now governments are almost sidelined here with a poverty of ideas. That kind of lack of institutional response is leaving open some

unprecedented opportunities for leadership companies who are developing a new kind of brand loyalty by helping their consumers close the gap between their aspirations as citizens and their consumer behavior. By doing so, their customers feel much better and are therefore loyal because the company has presented itself almost as a facilitator, aligning the two parts of them. There is a lot of potency there."

The reverse is true, too. Miller tells *BATE* the public can rise up and "bite" companies that fail to meet the challenge. Miller points to the automobile industry as the sector in which people have the most palpable sense of there being a misalignment.

"For years when I presented that people are quite concerned about the environment, [listeners] have said, 'Yeah, yeah. But when they start changing their driving behavior, that will convince me.' Well, we've got six global car manufacturers subscribing to our research and, believe me, they know that real change is coming. They are working to manage that by a technical fix. The auto industry does that well. It is one area of the environment where the public actually believes that there is a technical fix.

"But in most other areas of the environment, people believe that consumption patterns and lifestyles have to change. They are floundering around, but they are getting to the point where some shifts are going to occur unless managed by companies."

Over the past two decades, environment concerns have been dominated by the pollution agenda. That, too, is about to change, Miller says.

"Early indications in our research show that this is in the process of being replaced or, at least, merged with the nature agenda. We ask people across the 34 countries to rank a whole series of environmental issues as to their seriousness. Yes, when we don't prompt them, air and water pollution are the standard top ones in almost every country. But when we probe them around about 12 specific issues, what's striking is the extent to which the disappearance of natural resources,

species loss, and things like this come up and mingle with the air and water issues.

“When we probe on species loss, we find more real gut concerns on the part of the public than on climate change — way more. So, the nature agenda is coming on, and for, say, the upstream oil and gas industry, this is going to have huge impacts. It has been the transportation issue in the use of their products that has predominated their agenda in the general public realm. But the impacts on nature at the production phase are going to be under more scrutiny.”

According to *The Environmental Monitor 2000 International Report*, 25% of those surveyed feel that the chemical and oil industries are doing nothing at all to reduce their environmental impacts. By and large, multinational companies are seldom seen as part of the solution.

“For those of us following the field, this is somewhat ironic. Some of us think they are really the only ones actually doing much these days, and some of the best thinking that I run into is happening within large companies. But what companies are dragging along with them is this history of skepticism and lack of differentiation of leadership companies from the pack.”

Miller says that while “no one really owns the turf” versus the competition in the petroleum, oil, and chemical industries around the world, the research also shows that some companies do manage to stand out. “There is justice,” he says. “Leadership companies are perceived better.”

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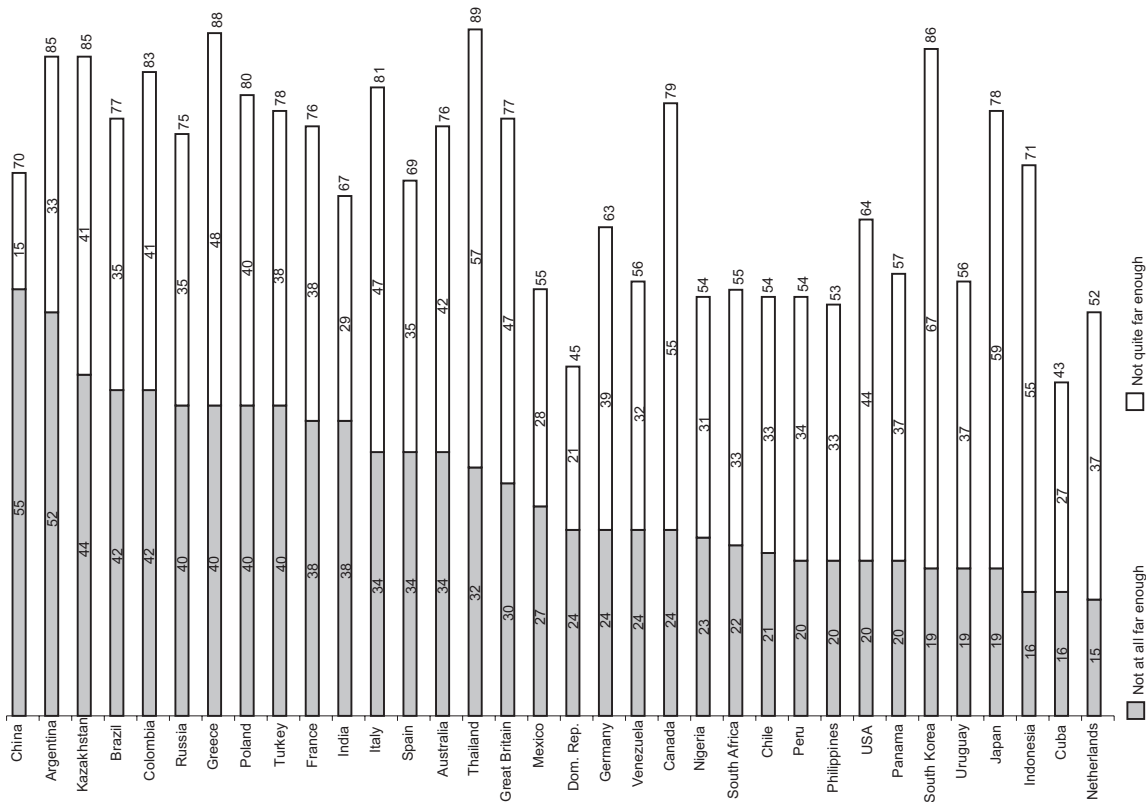


Figure 1 — Appropriateness of environmental laws. Only in the Dominican Republic and Cuba does a majority of people surveyed think environmental protection laws and regulations, as they are now applied, go far enough. Source: *The Environmental Monitor 2000*.

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Business and the Environment® is published monthly by Cutter Information Corp., 37 Broadway, Suite 1, Arlington, MA 02474-5552, USA. Tel: +1 781 641 9876 or +1 800 492 1650 in North America, Fax: +1 781 648 1950 or +1 800 888 1816 in North America, Web site: www.cutter.com/environment/.

Editorial Office: Tel: +1 603 672 5811, Fax: +1 603 672 5212.

Subscriptions: \$497 per year; \$597 outside North America. University subscription rate: \$249 per year; \$299 outside North America. ISSN 1089-0866. When changing your address, please include both old and new addresses with ZIP code numbers, accompanied by a mailing label from a recent issue.

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