



Survey Report

County Green Programs

July 2008

National Association of Counties

Research Division

Many U.S. counties have adopted "green programs" – or initiatives to coordinate county efforts relating to a range of environmental issues and strategies. Green programs tend to work across issues and use integrative strategies such as environmentally preferred procurement and green building. In June 2008, the National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. surveyed a sample of U.S. counties to better understand how and to what extent counties are adopting green programs.

The questionnaire was distributed by email to a random sample of 801 specific county administrators, county clerks, planners, county professionals and others, each working for a unique county. Weights for population-size-category and geography were also used to generate a representative sample. In the end, the sample was partially affected by the availability of email addresses. Initially the sample included 900 counties.

One hundred and forty-seven counties from 40 states responded to the questionnaire. Eighty-nine counties, or 60 percent of respondents, were **rural** – defined here as counties with 50,000 or less in population. Fifty-eight counties (39%) were **urban** – defined here as counties with more than 50,000 in population. The actual proportion of rural counties in the U.S. is about 70%; hence urban counties are somewhat over-represented in the number of responses.

A caution: the results below reflect conditions at the 147 responding counties; the number of responses is insufficient to fully reflect the situation of the full population of 3,068 U.S. counties.

Highlights from 147 unique county responses

147 respondents (89 rural, 58 urban)

Respondents were county administrators, county clerks, planners, county professionals and others.

Some differences between urban and rural groups relate to:

- proportion with green programs in place
- proportion having alternative vehicles
- funding expectations
- employment of a public engineer

58% say that programs are in place to encourage green practices

60% are working on energy efficiency issues

43% expect "no funding" and 34% expect funding to stay the same or increase

68% recommend "energy efficiency upgrades" if more funding were available

12% say their county has a green programs coordinator

45% say they employ a public engineer

Limited proliferation of formal traditional and integrative green policies

- (e.g. green building 10%)

74% have the authority to adopt zoning codes

69% said the county can adopt building codes

Of these, only 19% have code to encourage energy efficiency or green building

88% noted barriers

7% promote or require a green building standard (LEED¹ cited most often)

Few respondents are aware of incentives for green practices offered by their county

29% say one or more of the ten most recent buildings incorporated green features

12% own or operate a green-certified building

25% have alternative fuel and/or hybrid vehicles (only 9% in rural counties)

¹ Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design

84% do not have a green purchasing policy

21% have, will or plan to conduct a county operations green house gas survey

10% have, will or plan to conduct a community green house gas survey

12% have some type green house gas emissions reduction target

14% generate renewable energy (landfill-to-gas cited most often)

67% agree: green products and services are more available

41% agree: The # of businesses in the county that have adopted green practices is increasing

47% agree: Builders and architects in the county have capacity for green building

80% agree: ENERGY STAR appliances are available locally

Discussion

The survey questions and a discussion of responses follow below.

Does your county have programs in place to encourage green practices?

Fifty-eight percent of respondents indicated that their county has programs in place to encourage green practices. For rural counties, the percent with green programs in place was 46 percent and for urban counties, 76 percent.

Which of the following green issue areas is your county currently working on?

Table 1 shows the percentages of responding counties that indicated activity on green issues. More counties indicated activity focused on "traditional" environmental issues such as water quality and water conservation, land use planning, and waste management. Fewer respondents, though still substantial numbers, indicated that their county is working with integrative strategies such as green procurement or green building. However, a solid majority of respondents is working on energy-efficiency. Seventeen percent had no response.

Table 1. What green issues is your county working on?

Issue	Percent (n=147)
Energy efficiency	60%
Waste management	59%
Land use planning	50%
Water quality and water conservation	48%
Electronic waste (e-waste)	31%
Alternative fuels and vehicles	28%
Green building	26%
Environmentally preferable purchasing or procurement	26%
Climate protection or global warming	15%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county green programs in June 2008. The percentages above reflect the number respondents that indicated an activity for a particular "green" activity relative to the total number of survey respondents.

What is your expectation for funding green programs in the next budget cycle?

The respondents were split on their expectation of funding for green programs in the next budget cycle. A plurality (43%) expects "no funding," while 34 percent expect funding to stay the same or increase. Many (21%) were unsure. As shown in Table 2, rural respondents had a lower expectation of funding for green programs.

Table 2. Respondents' expectation of funding for green programs (147 counties).

Outlook	Percent (all)	Percent rural	Percent urban
No funding	43%	55%	24%
Decrease in funding	2%	1%	3%
Funding will stay the same	21%	19%	24%
Increase in funding	13%	9%	19%
Don't know	21%	16%	29%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county "green programs" in June 2008. There were responses from one hundred and forty-seven counties.

If funding were more available to your county for green efforts, what top TWO priorities would you recommend?

Respondents most often recommended the following top two priorities if more funding were available:

- building energy efficiency upgrades (68%);
- alternative fuels or vehicles (34%); and expand waste management or recycling program (34%).

Does your county currently have a staff position to coordinate green efforts?

Only 12% of respondents indicated that their county has a staff position for a green programs coordinator. Most of these are full-time. A strong majority (85%) does not have a coordinator and does not have plans to hire one.

Does your county have a certified public engineer (P.E.) on staff?

A certified public engineer is more common among responding counties. Forty-five percent of all respondents have a public engineer; most of these are full-time. A public engineer is less common among the rural responding counties. Of 88 responding rural counties, 29% indicated that the county employs a public engineer.

Has your county established any of the following with the goal of encouraging green practices? (Check all that apply)

Seventy-six of the respondents (52%) indicated that the county had established one of several select organizing strategies to encourage green practices, as shown in Table 3. Twenty-two of the responding counties (15%) indicated that the county had established one of several select policy strategies to encourage green practices, as shown in Table 4.

Table 3. Percent indicating select organizing strategies to encourage green practices (147 responding counties).

Organizing strategy	Percent
Staff team or committee	29%
Community outreach	27%
Staff trainings or workshops	25%
Intergovernmental workgroup	19%
County board or commission	18%
Interlocal agreement	10%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county green programs in June 2008. One hundred and forty-seven counties responded. Of these, 76 indicated at least one of the above organizing strategies to encourage green practices.

Table 4. Percent indicating select policy strategies to encourage green practices (147 responding counties).

Organizing strategy	Percent
Energy efficiency programs in low income housing	10%
Financial incentives (credits, subsidies)	7%
Financial disincentives (fees, surcharges, taxes)	1%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county green programs in June 2008. One hundred and fortyseven counties responded. Of these, 22 indicated at least one of the above policy strategies to encourage green practices.

Does your county have an ordinance, resolution, code or formal policy focused on the following? Check all that apply.

Among the 147 counties, the responses suggest a limited proliferation of green policies. From the selections in the questionnaire, the three most prevalent formal policies indicated were recycling drop-off center (44%), protecting farmland (37%), and protecting open or natural spaces/lands (35%). For the rural county respondents, recycling drop-off centers are more prevalent, and curbside pick-up is less so.

As shown in Table 5, other types of integrative green policies appear to be less commonly adopted.

Table 5. Percent of 147 responding counties indicating an ordinance, resolution, code or formal policy focused on the following, ordered by percent.

	Percent
Recycling drop off center	44%
Protecting farmland	37%
Protecting open or natural spaces (lands)	35%
Residential curbside recycling pick up	24%
Increasing energy efficiency in county operations	24%
Promoting water conservation	24%
Commercial recycling	20%
Electronic waste (e-waste)	19%
Air quality management	16%
Promoting environmentally preferable purchasing or procurement for county operations	12%
Reducing greenhouse gas emissions	10%
Establishing or enabling a green-building program in your county	10%
Using alternative fuels or alternative vehicles in your county's vehicle fleet	9%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county green programs in June 2008. One hundred and forty-seven counties responded.

Does your county have the ability to adopt zoning codes?

Almost three-fourths (74%) of responding counties have the authority to adopt zoning codes. Eighteen percent indicated that the county does not have this authority, while 7% did not know.

Does your county government have authority to adopt county building codes?

Sixty-nine percent or 101 respondents said their county has the ability to adopt building codes.

Does your county building code contain provisions to encourage more energy efficiency and/or green commercial or residential building construction?

Of the 101 respondents that may adopt building codes:

- only 19 percent indicated that the county's code includes provisions to encourage energy efficiency or green building. A majority (53%) said the codes did not include such provisions; 28% did not know.
- In addition, 88 percent noted barriers that impede adoption of such provisions. The most often cited barriers were: lack of interest; resistance among developers or builders; and "other."

For commercial buildings, does your county promote or require a green building standard or certification?

A strong majority (86%) of responding counties does not promote or require a green building standard. For the 11 that do promote or require a standard, LEED was the certification or standard most often identified (9/11).

What incentives does your county government offer local builders to encourage green practices in residential or commercial construction? (Check all that apply)

Few respondents indicated awareness of county government incentives to encourage green building practices. A majority of respondents did not know. Some incentives were indicated:

- expedited permitting process (5 counties)
- marketing (4)
- tax credits (3)
- reduced permitting fees (1)
- other (9)

Of the ten most recent commercial buildings constructed in your county, how many incorporated a significant number of green features?

Respondents were largely unaware of recent green building in their county; most (55%) did not know. Twenty-nine percent said that one or more out of ten of the most recent buildings did incorporate a significant number of green features.

How many green-certified buildings does your county own and/or operate?

As shown in Table 6 below, 75% of responding counties indicated that they do not own or operate any green-certified buildings. Sixteen counties, including five rural ones, operate one-to-five buildings while two counties operate five to ten green-certified buildings.

Table 6. How many green-certified buildings does your county own and/or operate?

	Percent
None	75%
1-5 buildings	11%
5-10 buildings	1%
10-15 buildings	0%
More than 15 buildings	0%
Don't know	13%

The National Association of Counties (NACo) in Washington D.C. conducted a survey on county green programs in June 2008. There were responses from one hundred and forty-seven counties.

Does your county government vehicle fleet currently include alternative fuels and/or hybrid electric vehicles? What kind?

As shown in Table 7, only one quarter of responding counties have alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles. For rural counties, the percent is much lower. Of the thirty-six responding counties that have alternative fuel vehicles, a variety of vehicles are represented. These include ethanol (14 counties), hybrid (12), biodiesel (11), hybrid-electric (11), and natural gas propane (7).

Table 7. Does your county government vehicle fleet currently include alternative fuels and/or hybrid-electric vehicles?

	Percent (all)	Percent rural	Percent urban
Yes	25%	9%	50%
No	71%	87%	48%
Don't Know	3%	4%	2%

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Does your county have a green or environmental purchasing policy?

An overwhelming number of respondents (84%) said their county does not have a green purchasing policy. Of the 15 counties with a policy:

- paper (14/15) and cleaning products were most included (14/15)
- ENERGYSTAR was the most often identified label (7/15)
- Lack of information was the most often identified barrier (7/15)

**Has your county conducted a county operations green house gas emissions survey?
A community survey?**

The majority of responding counties have not conducted a green house gas emissions survey, as shown in Table 8. Twenty one percent have or will conduct a county operations survey. Ten percent have or will conduct a community survey. Several rural counties are engaged in this work.

Table 8. Percent of responding counties that have conducted a county operations or community green house gas emissions survey?

	Operations	Community
Yes, we have completed one	6%	2%
Yes, we are working on one	7%	3%
No, but we will be starting one	8%	5%
No, we have no plans to do one	70%	81%
Don't know	10%	10%

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Does your county have greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets?

Most (80%) of the responding counties reported that they do not have green house gas emissions targets. Twelve percent reported having some type of county operations or community target. Eight percent did not know.

Does your county government generate renewable energy? How?

Fourteen percent (20) of responding counties do generate renewable energy while 79% do not. Seven percent did not know. Respondents from the 20 counties that do generate renewable energy reported the following energy sources: generating landfill-gas-to energy (13 counties); solar (8); hydro (2); geothermal (2); biomass (1).

Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Table 9 illustrates perceptions of respondents. There is less agreement that local businesses, architects and builders have adopted green practices or have the capacity to complete green projects.

Table 9. Percent agreeing with statement and percent that does not know.

Statement	Agree or strongly agree	Disagree or strongly disagree	Don't know
The number of businesses offering green goods or services has increased over the last five years	67%	6%	14%
The number of businesses that have adopted green practices in the county has increased over the last five years.	41%	14%	20%
Local builders and architects in the county have the capacity to implement green building projects.	47%	6%	24%
ENERGY STAR appliances are readily available in local retail stores.	80%	5%	11%

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