

# Eco-anxiety in the Workplace: Shifting from helplessness to hope

A Workplace Health Solutions Guide

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in conjunction with QNP (Québec Net Positif)

Research Chair in Mental Health, Self-Management and Work – Powered by Beneva

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People  
protecting  
people

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# Summary

Eco-anxiety has progressively become one of several mental health risk factors in the workplace. It refers to persistent feelings of fear, worry and sadness about current and future climate change. It can even negatively affect employees' sleep and mental wellbeing.

In 2025, the Research Chair in Mental Health, Self-Management and Work, powered by Beneva, conducted a first large-scale study on eco-anxiety in SMEs. The responses from 2,020 employees, including 740 managers, were analyzed. Several opportunities for reflection and action were identified.

## Major concerns, moderate impacts

69% of employees surveyed reported that anxiety first manifests itself in the form of concern and emotions.

Environmental Concern:  
**59.3/100**



The effects of eco-anxiety remain moderate in 20% of workers surveyed.

Consequences on Performance:  
**28.7/100**



This difference would suggest that concerns often precede the negative impacts on mental health and performance at work. Employers should see this as a window of opportunity for preventive action.





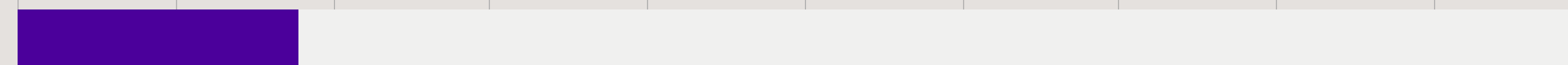
## Climate change ambivalence

At first glance, the emotions reported by those surveyed appear contradictory because helplessness and hope seem to coexist. This is valuable insight for SMEs. In an open-minded and supportive workplace, it is important to leverage this sense of hope to strengthen mobilization and engagement.

## The perceived gap between individual and organizational efforts

The study also revealed a gap between the environmental actions employees take and their perception of their employer's commitment.

Percentage of employees who feel that SMEs have an environmental culture:  
**17.7/100**



For employers, this marks an opportunity to take action and innovate. When employees feel that their values and those of their employer align, they tend to be more engaged and perform better at work.

## Different experiences, same issue

Eco-anxiety resonates with employees based on their values, expectations and desire to take action. However, the experience varies by gender, age and role.

Managers, for example, must contend with their own concerns as well as those of their teams.

Prevention becomes possible through simple, gradual actions that support sustainable performance. For more information about these findings and to find out what actions to take, please consult the guide.

**The persistent feelings of fear, worry and sadness about current and future climate change.**

# Do employees bring their concerns about the future to work with them?

This affects both individual wellbeing and collective performance. The study presented in this guide offers answers, along with simple and practical steps you can take.



The subject of climate change is everywhere, whether in the media or in private conversations. An increasing number of employees feel marked and measurable anxiety about the future, which ultimately piles on to other forms of anxiety (financial, family, etc.). This is known as **eco-anxiety**, which is “the distress and worry about the future impacts of climate change on the planet and human life.”<sup>1</sup>

It manifests through fear of:

- Environmental doom
- Bringing children into an uncertain world
- Scarcity of natural resources

Caring about the environment is normal and understandable. “However, persistent anxiety related to human-induced climate change can become severe enough to disrupt daily functioning, including sleep, work, and social relationships.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Clayton, 2020.  
2. Ayassamy et al., 2024.

## Why address eco-anxiety from the perspective of SMEs?

- Employees tend to bring their concerns to work with them.
- Eco-anxiety in the workplace is still poorly documented despite its growing presence.
- It affects everyone differently, with repercussions on recruitment and employee retention.
- Compared to large companies, SMEs have a greater capacity to be caring and agile. This means they can spot the warning signs more quickly and raise awareness about eco-anxiety. They can also implement measures to mitigate the negative impacts.

The links between eco-anxiety, mental health and SMEs are presented on [page 9](#).

### An opportunity for preventive action by SMEs

Eco-anxiety has made its way into the SME workplace, but the impacts may not always be immediate. In other words, there is a **window of opportunity** for preventive action. **This is a key juncture where it becomes possible to promptly intervene with simple, realistic steps.**

The tips and practical advice provided in this guide are meant to:

- Raise awareness about eco-anxiety and understand its potential impacts on mental health, workplace attendance, engagement and performance.
- Show how the situation affects SME employees in Canada.
- Promote prevention without overcomplicating matters or making people feel guilty.
- Transform a vague concern into a driving force for action, consistency and mobilization.

Creating an environment where concerns can be heard, addressed and turned into action helps protect the mental wellbeing of your employees and the long-term sustainability of your organization.

#### Where does the data come from?

The findings presented in this guide are based on research conducted in 2025 by the Research Chair in Mental Health, Self-Management and Work, powered by Beneva.

Eco-anxiety in the workplace is a relatively new topic. Until recently, surveys on eco-anxiety focused mainly on the general population or on the psychological impacts of natural disasters. Few studies looked at people's experiences in the workplace. In Canada, this is the very first large-scale survey specifically focusing on SMEs.

Before presenting the study's findings and the measures SMEs choose to implement, it is important to situate eco-anxiety with respect to employee mental health and impact on the organization.

The data was obtained from an online questionnaire completed by 2,020 SME employees, including 740 managers, across the country.

The goal was to:

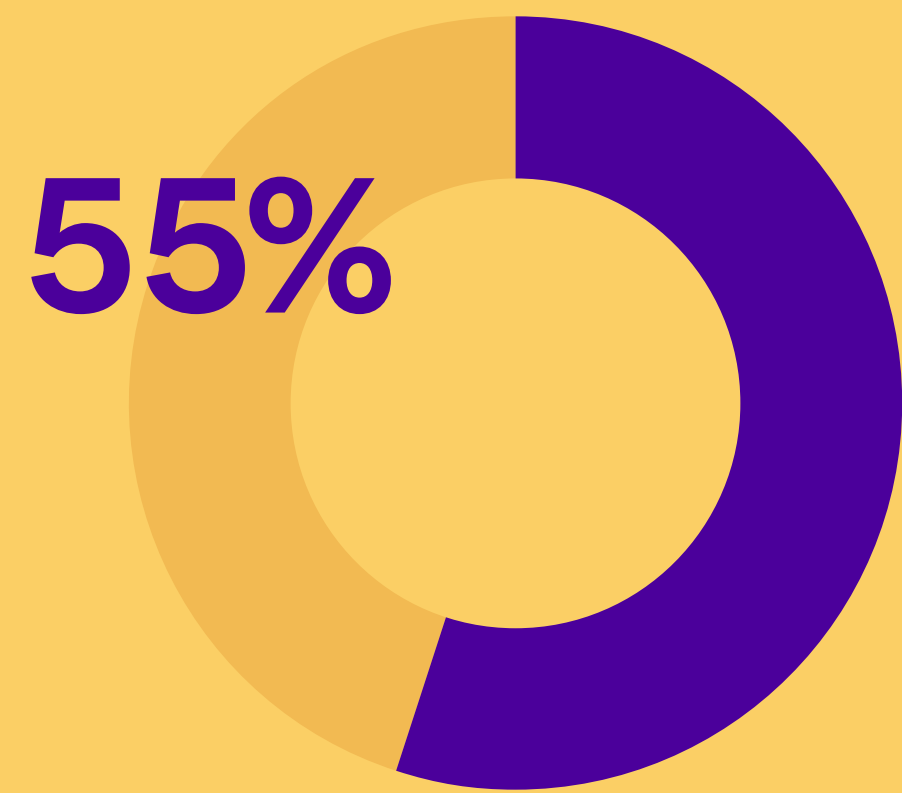
- Quantify eco-anxiety in the workplace.
- Determine the correlation with employee mental wellbeing.
- Provide an overview of eco-anxiety by age, gender and managerial position.
- Identify actions specific to SMEs.

# 01

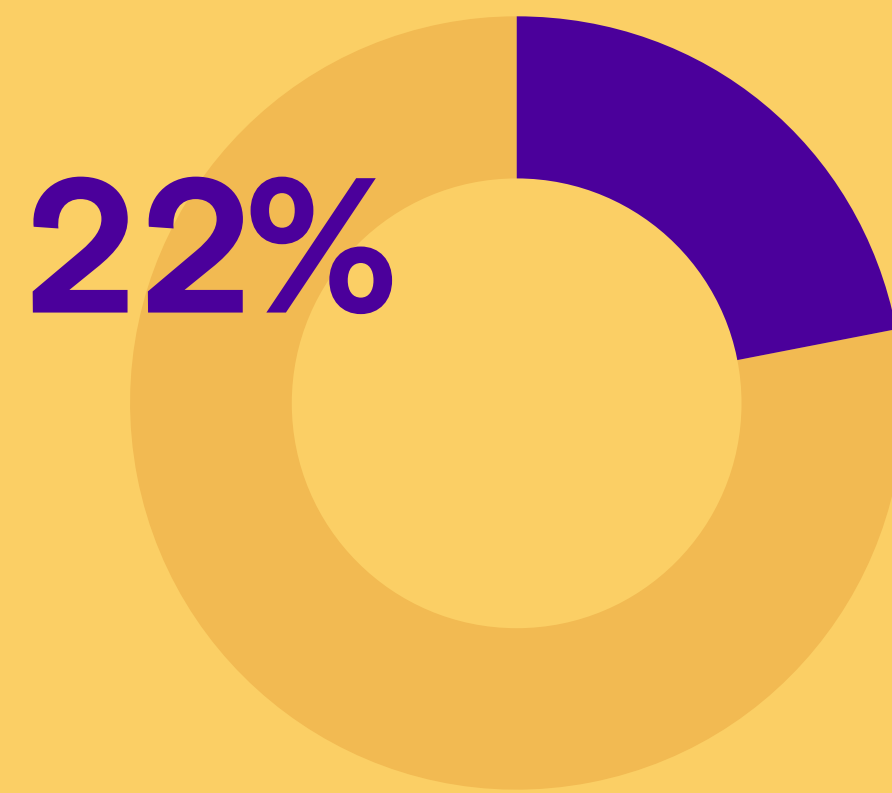
# Eco-anxiety as a Mental Health Issue for SMEs

Mental health issues in the workplace are well-documented. However, intense or prolonged eco-anxiety can exacerbate mental health issues.

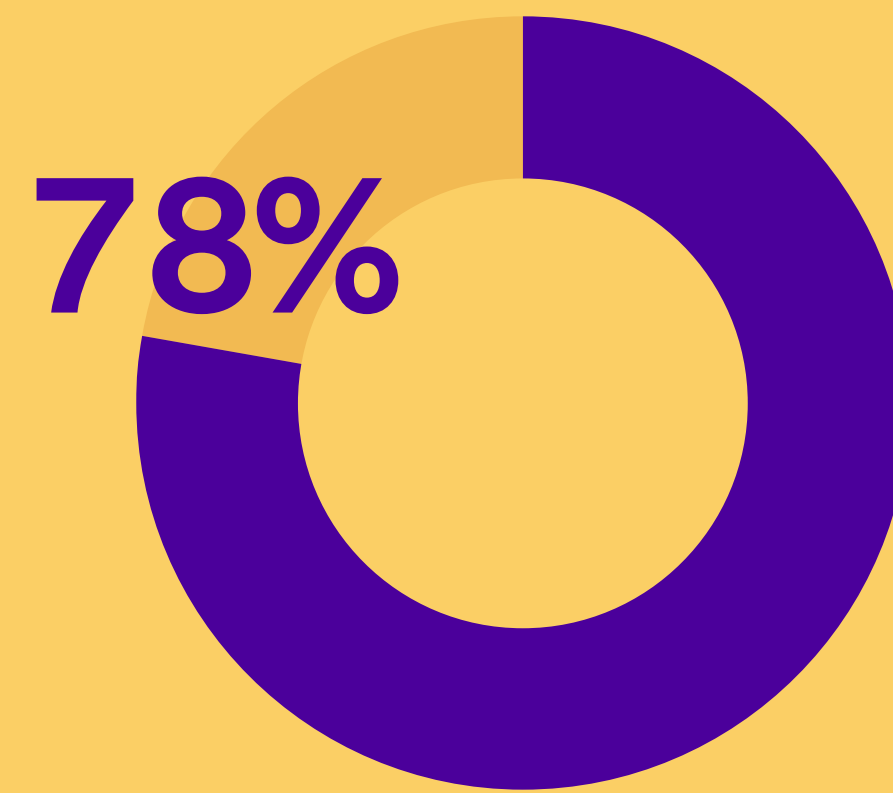
## Numbers tell the story



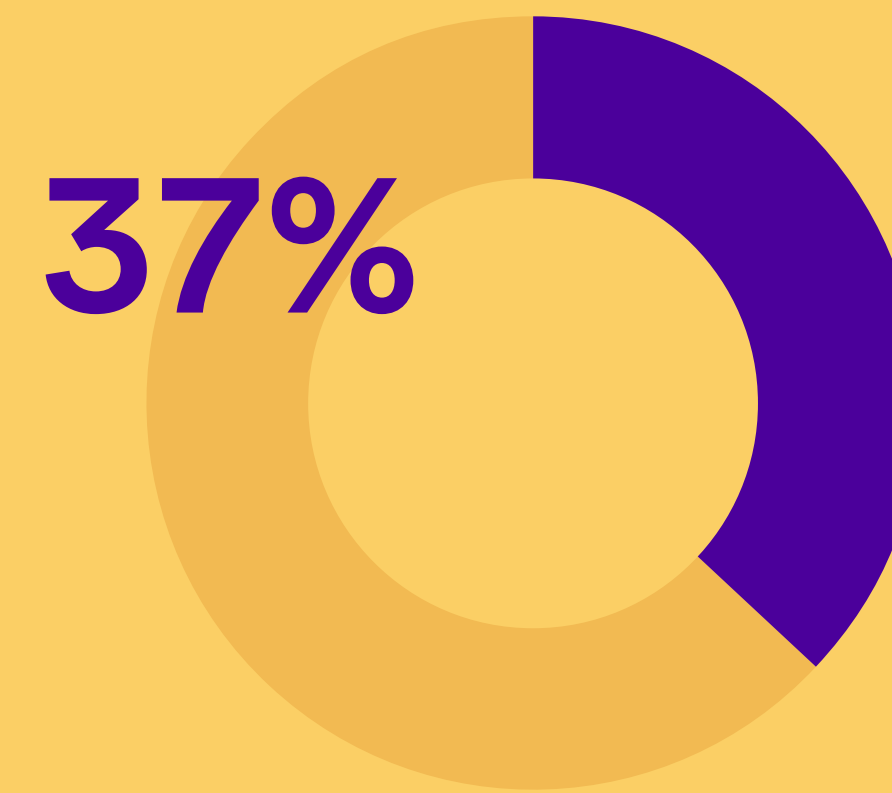
55% of employees in Quebec SMEs report having experienced at least one mental health issue in 2023.



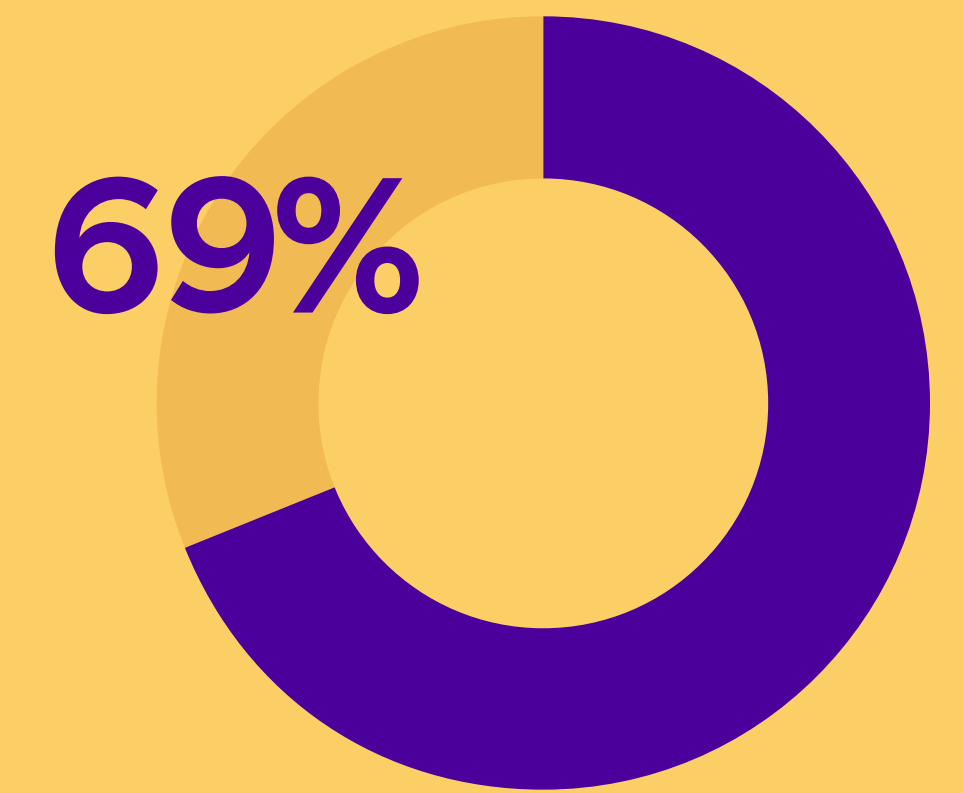
22% of them were experiencing a clinical-level burnout at the time.<sup>3</sup>



78% of young Canadians aged 16 to 25 say that the climate crisis is affecting their mental health.



37% of them feel that their eco-anxiety affects their daily functioning.<sup>4</sup>



69% of employees worldwide want their employer to invest more in sustainable practices (this percentage increases among 18–34 year-olds).<sup>5</sup>

3. Villeneuve et al., 2023.  
4. Galway and Field, 2023.  
5. Deloitte, 2023.

## 01 – ECO-ANXIETY AS A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE FOR SMEs

Once eco-anxiety is in the workplace, it tends to compound existing stressors, particularly psychosocial risks such as work overload or a lack of recognition.

The [2025 Workplace Health Solutions](#) report explores psychosocial risks in more detail.

Employees with chronic eco-anxiety may also show **signs of psychological distress**, such as anxiety, depression or **emotional exhaustion**. This tendency is exacerbated when a person feels they are working for a company that is indifferent to environmental issues.<sup>6</sup>

### How is this manifested?

#### Individually

- Employees suffering from eco-anxiety may find it difficult to sleep and concentrate. Some take more time off due to stress.<sup>7</sup>
- In the longer term, those experiencing eco-anxiety risk losing their ability to adapt and make decisions. This mental decline can hinder their creativity, their problem-solving skills and their ability to innovate at work.<sup>8</sup>

#### At team and corporate levels

Some documented effects are real:

- Healthcare professionals suggest that higher levels of eco-anxiety lead to diminished engagement and decreased motivation.<sup>9</sup>
- When employees perceive a disconnect between the climate emergency and their employer's actions (or inaction), they tend to be less satisfied at work, possibly undermining their trust in management.<sup>10</sup>



6. Ayassamy et al., 2024; Zsóka, 2007.

7. Villeneuve et al., 2021.

8. Boluda-Verdú et al., 2022; Christodoulou et al., 2024.

9. Atta et al., 2024.

10. Banwo and Du, 2019.

## Reversing the trend for improved wellbeing and performance

What happens when an employer recognizes its employees' environmental concerns? Research suggests that employees then find more meaning in their work, which helps strengthen their engagement.<sup>11</sup>

SMEs should focus on the following findings.

- According to recent data in Quebec, more than half of the SME workforce cited experiencing mental health difficulties.<sup>12</sup>
- Compared to larger companies, employees generally have less access to psychological support services.<sup>13</sup>

In this context, eco-anxiety can exacerbate existing stressors when left unaddressed. This makes prevention all the more relevant for SMEs.

Fortunately, the close-knit nature and more flexible structure of SMEs tend to facilitate two-way communication, open discussions and the detection of early warning signs. This flexibility also allows them to test simple, often low-cost measures, thanks to a lack of bureaucratic red tape.<sup>14</sup>

The findings explain how eco-anxiety manifests itself in SME workers in Canada. They plot a realistic course of action to shift the situation towards hope and engagement.

**In the workplace, eco-anxiety can be used to measure the consistency between voiced values and experienced values.**

**Recognizing and addressing eco-anxiety means choosing prevention and sustainable performance. This approach can support employee mental health, while also bolstering talent attraction and retention.**

11. Bissing-Olson et al., 2013; Cleveland et al., 2005.

12. Villeneuve et al., 2023.

13. Visentin et al., 2020; Bennett et al., 2022.

14. Wiklund et al., 2018.

# 02

# Eco-anxiety in Canadian SMEs

This section presents an overview of how eco-anxiety manifests itself in Canadian SMEs.

## Environmental Anxiety: From environmental concerns to consequences on performance

The results show that eco-anxiety is initially expressed through concerns and emotions. Over time, this can affect an employee's performance at work.



The study focused on:

- **Environmental concern** – the worry and emotions felt in response to the effects of climate change and environmental doom.
- **Consequences on performance** – the actual impacts on performance, both at work and at home.

The gap, expressed on a 100-point index, is as follows:

- **Environmental concern** is 59.3.
- **Consequences of performance** is 28.7.

In other words, employees in SMEs are worried, but for the time being, they report fewer effects at home and at work.

This shows that mental health prevention is possible. It also creates an opportunity to improve wellbeing at work and create a collective commitment to environmental values.

Researchers had already observed that environmental concern first takes the form of worries before translating into more tangible behaviours,<sup>15</sup> providing a window of opportunity for preventive action.

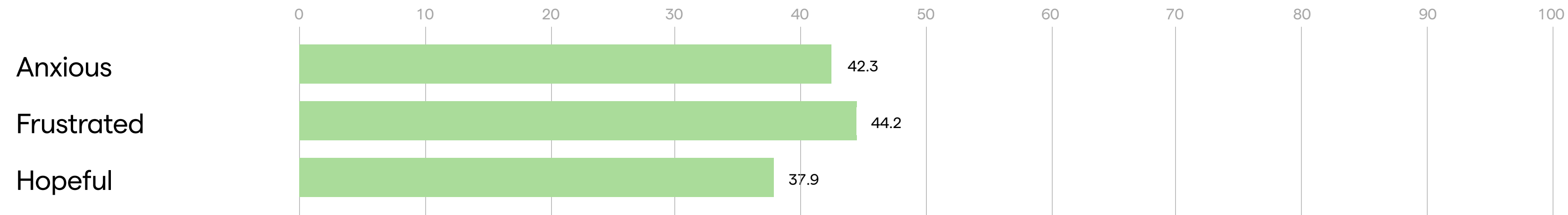
The study also tailors specific findings and actions to SMEs.

15. Clayton, 2020.

## Eco-emotions, from helplessness to hope

Much like eco-anxiety, eco-emotions linked to environmental changes also exist. The table below illustrates the intensity of these emotions in SME employees surveyed in Canada.

Canadian SMEs Facing Eco-anxiety (total out of 100)



The results reveal ambivalence among those experiencing eco-anxiety, being both saddened and hopeful about the situation.<sup>16</sup> Negative eco-emotions, such as anxiety or frustration, tend to be offset by a high level of hope. This hope could be leveraged to encourage mobilization and change.

**In a supportive workplace where employees can express their eco-emotions, eco-anxiety has the potential to mobilize employees and boost innovation.**

### Individual environmental actions

In addition to eco-emotions, SME employees also report taking action for the environment by:

- Sorting out waste and recycling (average score of 77.3 out of 100)
- Making sustainable choices, such as reducing waste or using eco-friendly materials (57.5 out of 100)

Actions done in conjunction with the organization—such as reducing energy consumption at work (51.3)—are less common.

16. Pihkala, 2020.

## SME environmental commitment when it counts

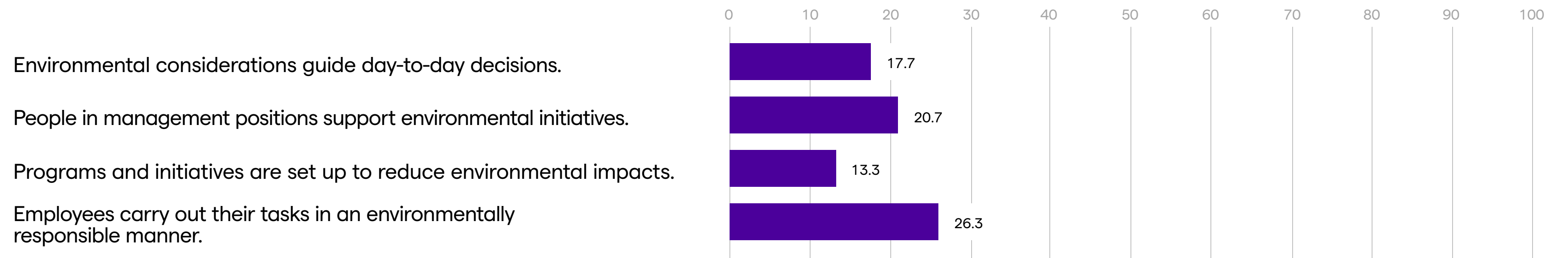
The study highlights a clear discrepancy between:

- The actions taken by SME employees to protect the environment; and
- The perceived environmental commitment of their employer.

On average, 17.7 out of 100 employees perceive that SMEs have an environmental culture. Why so low? The perception is that most organizations have no clear policies, visible practices and implemented projects concerning the environment.

The table shows examples of statements assessed in 2025 and the levels observed.

Environmental culture in Canadian SMEs (total out of 100)



Many employees take individual action while feeling that their employer is not doing enough. SMEs, for their part, often lack the resources to participate in environmental initiatives, even when employees are highly committed to them.<sup>17</sup>

Over time, this disconnect creates a blind spot between the organization's visible actions and the employees' values.

Thankfully, it can also be leveraged to retain talent and strengthen the employer brand.

### Eco-anxiety in Canadian SMEs

A mixed bag:

- Strong environmental concerns among employees
- Intense, sometimes ambivalent emotions
- Positive individual behaviours
- Perception of lacking corporate commitment

The next section—essential for a better understanding—explores the links between eco-anxiety, mental health and workplace performance.

17. Visentin et al., (2020).

# 03

# Eco-anxiety in the Workplace: The effects on mental health and job performance

Eco-anxiety is not limited to emotions and concerns.

**It is also expressed through documented indicators relating to mental health and performance at work.**

For example:

- The more employees care about the environment, the more they tend to look after their own wellbeing.
- The fact that they have a professional role may also take on greater significance and meaning in their eyes.

**Other high potential indicators for employers.**

- When employees perceive that their values and those of their employer align, **their performance and commitment tend to increase.**<sup>18</sup>
- Eco-anxiety is, in fact, an emotion rooted in values, capable of stimulating collective commitment and a search for meaning.<sup>19</sup>

Along with hope and motivation are **other negative, very human** perceptions, with implications for SMEs.

- A sense of powerlessness exacerbates the environmental vulnerability already felt by some employees.
- High levels of eco-anxiety undermine a person's ability to cope with everyday challenges and can decrease their productivity.

- It is not environmental concern in itself that undermines performance, but rather keeping it bottled up for a long time without being able to express it or get support. Once this tension takes hold, the links to mental health become more pronounced. The risks of anxiety, fatigue, depression and burnout increase.

Recognizing eco-anxiety as an **early warning sign of stress** enables organizations to promptly intervene, before distress or disengagement sets in.

**Beyond a certain threshold, eco-anxiety can become a stressor in its own right at work, just like work overload or poorly defined roles.**<sup>20</sup>

**Taking this into account means taking action to promote mental wellbeing.**

18. Banwo and Du, 2019.  
19. Pihkala, 2020.  
20. Cosh et al., 2024.

# 04

# The Many Faces of Eco-anxiety: Everyone is affected differently

The effects of eco-anxiety vary according to age, gender and job.

Understanding these differences does not mean labeling people. It means recognizing that support measures work better when tailored to different experiences. For SMEs, this is a practical, effective approach that is more caring approach.

The differences according to age, gender and job, including managerial roles, are presented below.



## Paying attention to young employees' concerns

Studies<sup>21</sup> show that workers 18 to 34 have higher levels of eco-anxiety than those 35 and over.

With respect to climate change:

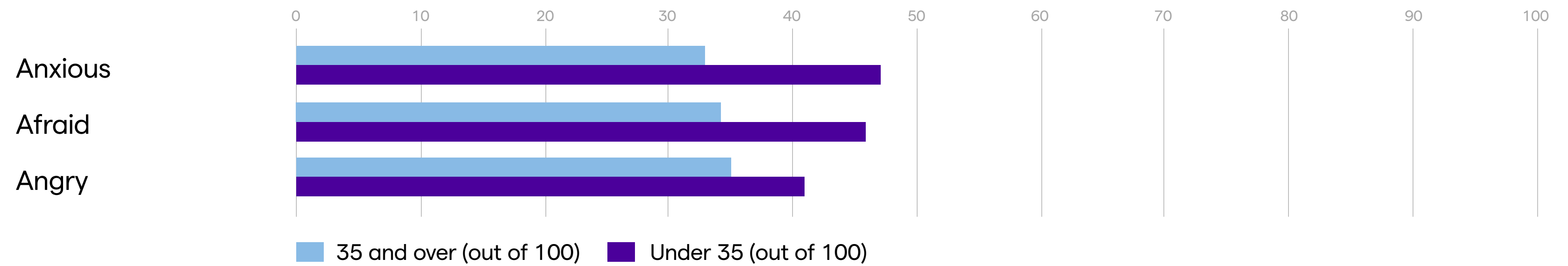
- Their concern for the next generation is 65 out of 100.
- This is nearly 5 points higher than among older workers. Those surveyed also report more intense negative emotions in the face of climate change including anxiety, fear and anger.

### Increased sensitivity to employer behaviour

Young employees are the most affected by their employer's efforts—or lack thereof—on environmental issues.

When a company's actions do not match its values, the negative perception of 18-34 year olds can lead to a loss of purpose, engagement or turnover.

Comparison - Eco-emotions x Age



### Helping young employees cope with eco-anxiety

You can adapt prevention strategies by:

- Donating obsolete computers to a not-for-profit that recycles them and promote the benefits – waste reduction, reuse, etc.
- Encouraging participation in environmental efforts.
- Providing spaces for a frank discussion on climate issues.
- Supporting engagement through concrete measures like allocated time or incentives.

### What these findings mean for SMEs

**Greatly concerned by the environment, young workers are keen on making sure their employer's words and actions align.**

21. Hickman et al., 2021; Galway and Field, 2023.

## Different experiences for men and women

The effects of eco-anxiety vary greatly by gender. The women surveyed report a greater concern about the impacts of climate change.

Their fears for the next generation are more intense at 70 out of 100.

As for their male counterparts, this is 60 out of 100.

Their eco-friendly actions top at 56.8 out of 100 on average, which is 3.5% higher than men. As for men, their eco-anxiety manifests itself more often through tangible effects: poor sleep, irritability, tension or difficulty switching off.

Nevertheless, the men surveyed cite being more hopeful about the future.

## In SMEs, gender-related findings reveal that:

**Women, who are used to implementing eco-friendly actions, more intensely experience the emotions and concerns linked to climate change.**

**Men experience the physical effects of eco-anxiety in their day-to-day.**

### How to address gender-related differences?

Eco-anxiety does not manifest itself in quite the same way in men and women. Taking this into account allows us to tailor actions without adopting a one-size-fits-all approach.

Here are some practical suggestions based on the study's findings:

#### Based on issues raised by women

- Create spaces where concerns and emotions can be expressed openly, without fear of rejection or judgement.

#### Based on issues raised by men

- Pay attention to signs of fatigue, overload or irritability often associated with the physical effects of eco-anxiety.
- Promote environmental efforts in the workplace.

#### To help men and women in your organization

- Prioritize a flexible approach for different needs: emotional support for some, work accommodations for others.
- Train managers to see the warning signs of eco-anxiety, so they can tailor their interventions to people's experiences.

## Managers and eco-anxiety: a situation unique to them

Managers are not immune to eco-anxiety. Their levels of concern are comparable to those of other SME employees. However, the impact on their performance is more pronounced, especially in terms of exhaustion and mental fatigue.

Although they show higher levels of depression and anger, they also have more hope. These ambivalent eco-emotions reflect the pressure of having to meet expectations and act without always having the necessary tools at one's disposal.

Caught between bureaucracy and their own diligence, managers are more exposed to the impacts of eco-anxiety. Their position between the front line and the deciders is akin to being stuck between a rock and a hard place. Acknowledging this is essential to prevent them from bearing a burden that often exceeds their actual scope of action.

**The way managers experience eco-anxiety is specific to them. Like their teams, they too have climate concerns. However, their role exposes them to additional stressors.**

### Helping managers cope with eco-anxiety

Managers often feel the effects of eco-anxiety more acutely in their day-to-day lives.

They are best supported by:

- Giving them the tools to address their teams' concerns (e.g. frequently asked questions, training sessions, access to a contact person).
- Recognizing the burden of the managerial role rather than assuming that they always have the answers and the means to take action.
- Providing spaces where they can voice their own concerns free from their team's concerns.
- Clarifying the scope of action available to managers and the organization in order to reduce the sense of helplessness in the face of climate change.
- Avoid bestowing the sole responsibility for climate action on them and support organization-wide initiatives.
- Pay attention to signs of fatigue, overload or irritability often associated with the physical effects of eco-anxiety.



# 05

# Recommendations

## Early Actions: Prevent, support, mobilize

The following recommendations serve as guidelines for mitigating eco-anxiety in SMEs.

They are intended to support individuals, equip managers and strengthen commitment, without trying to do everything all at once.

### The course of action does not lead to a single solution, but rather to an approach:

- Recognizing eco-anxiety as an early warning sign and an organizational issue.
- Taking action before things get worse.
- Leveraging it for mobilization.

### 1. Treat the consequences on performance from eco-anxiety as a warning sign

Like other forms of anxiety, eco-anxiety has physical, emotional and mental impacts. It can be a drain on mental energy, concentration, creativity and collaboration.

**As an employer, ignoring the signs means looking the other way on disengagement and burnout.**

#### What managers can do

- Schedule a monthly check-in (e.g. asking about one's energy levels or perceived workload).
- Use current climate events (e.g. spring floods, forest fires, record-breaking heatwaves) to initiate a conversation, gauge the level of concern and offer support.
- Adjust priorities or deadlines on an ad hoc basis during periods of mental overload.

#### What employees can do

- Keep a wellness log (sleep, stress, energy levels) and speak to their manager when imbalance persists.
- Apply a self-care mental health routine (e.g. mindful breaks, identifying sources of stress, taking small steps).
- Make use of available support measures (e.g. EAP, MAP, community resources), if available.



## 2. Turn concerns into a driver for positive action

Most SME employees surveyed cite strong concerns about the climate, but few are currently experiencing distress. This means that their emotions can be channelled towards constructive behaviour rather than chronic anxiety.

**Taking action, even on a small scale, helps replace a sense of helplessness with a sense of control, while supporting collective mobilization.**

### What managers can do

- Schedule eco-friendly conversations every three months, where teams can choose concrete and realistic initiatives to implement.
- Follow training on how to accept employees' eco-emotions without judgement and help teams turn them into initiatives.

### What employees can do

- Transform their concerns into practical actions (e.g. avoid excess lighting, reduce paper usage, use public transportation)

## 3. Highlight the organization's environmental efforts

A gap between individual environmental values and the efforts made by the SME can foster a sense of inconsistency and lead to disengagement. Conversely, demonstrating that the company is taking action—even on a modest scale—restores trust and a sense of purpose.

**For SMEs, it is not the scope of the actions that matters, but rather their consistency and visibility.**

### What managers can do

- Create an internal environmental dashboard (greenboard) to track collective progress and boost motivation.
- Launch a quarterly team challenge with a measurable impact.

### What employees can do

- Suggest low-cost initiatives with tangible benefits.
- Present results (e.g. photos, statistics) at team meetings and on internal platforms (e.g. intranet, newsletter, 'greenboard').

#### 4. Cater to generational differences

Eco-anxiety varies with age. Younger employees seek opportunities to participate and give meaning. Their more experienced colleagues, on the other hand, tend to prioritize legacy and the transfer of knowledge.

**Recognizing differences helps avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and allows you to cater engagement strategies to employees' expectations and strengths.**

##### What managers can do

- Create mini-projects led by younger employees.
- Set up intergenerational collaboration on sustainability issues.

##### What employees can do

- Younger employees can suggest and lead a high-visibility initiative in the short term.
- Older employees can offer mentoring on sustainable initiatives.

#### 5. Strengthen self-management and resilience in everyday life

Self-management and resilience play a key role in preventing eco-anxiety from building up and affecting performance.

**Knowing one's limits, structuring one's schedule and recharging one's batteries strengthen emotional stability and performance.** These skills develop more easily when the organization encourages them.

##### What managers can do

- Offer short training sessions on stress management and mental recovery, tailored to SME employees.
- Make simple resources (e.g. resilience kit) containing exercises, support contacts and resource material available to employees.

##### What employees can do

- Practice quick self-care rituals every day (e.g. take time to switch off, meditate or go for a walk).
- Turn an intrusive thought into concrete action, like planning an eco-friendly initiative.

**Eco-anxiety is not a gap to be filled, but an opportunity to adapt and innovate.**

# Embracing eco-anxiety, hope for the future

Hope, commitment and proactivity are essential for transforming the collective environmental conscience into a sustainable competitive advantage.



Fuelled by current events and climate change, eco-anxiety is gradually emerging as a real and measurable mental health issue in the workplace, specifically in Canadian SMEs. There is growing concern among employees—particularly younger workers—about the future and collective responsibility of organizations.

Eco-anxiety is not just about environmental concern. It is also about hope, determination and a desire to take action. In this sense, when recognized and channelled, eco-anxiety can be leveraged for mobilization, innovation and resilience.

Based on the results of the study, this is an opportunity for SMEs, given their flexible structure and caring approach, to ensure:

- better mental wellbeing among staff, conducive to stability and innovation.
- meaning and coherence at work for young talent.
- corporate resilience.

What can we conclude from this? That eco-anxiety **is not a gap to be filled, but an opportunity to adapt and innovate.** It reflects a heightened awareness of the correlation between people, work and the environment.

SMEs that recognize eco-anxiety and provide a framework to address it will do more than support their teams, they will build more sustainable organizations.

**The question is not how to make eco-anxiety disappear, but how to cope with it.**

**Addressing eco-anxiety today means investing in the mental wellbeing of employees and the future resilience of organizations.**

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