



1.1 Online survey with subscribers to the service

1.1.1 Overview

This section presents the findings of a comprehensive survey of subscribers to SfEP carried out as a key part of the evaluation. The survey asked respondents their opinions on a wide range of issues, including background information on preferred sources of information on environment policy; perceptions of the service and habits regarding its use; ideas for improvement; and detailed profile information.

The survey was launched in mid November 2009 and remained open for two months, until January 2010. To promote the survey, all 11,540 subscribers¹ to the service were sent an email inviting them to take part. After three weeks those who had not responded were sent a reminder. In addition, the survey was promoted on the SfEP and DG ENV websites and in issues of the news alert itself. In all, 1,314 subscribers responded to the survey. This makes for a response rate of about 11.5%, which allows fairly robust conclusions to be drawn. Given the sampling size and response rate, the survey can be said to have a 95% 'confidence interval' of 2.55. Confidence interval is a statistical term that is used to define representativeness. In this case, it means that one can be 95% certain that the answer to a given question is within 2.55 percentage points in either direction of the 'true' response that would be obtained were all 11,540 subscribers to respond to the survey.

1.1.2 Summary of key findings

1.1.2.1 *Profile of respondents*

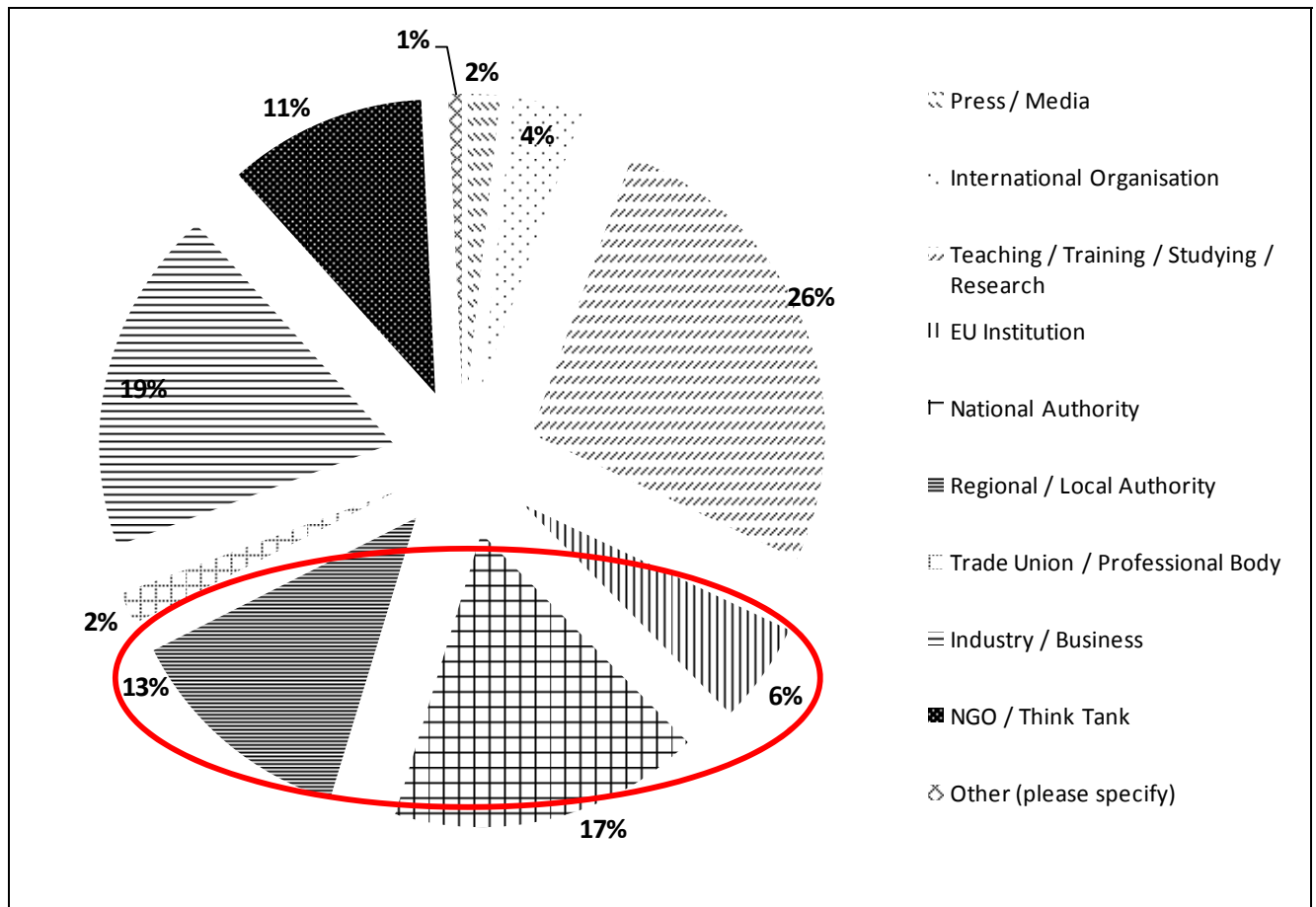
- SfEP has been operating under a very broad remit, addressing a vast target audience made up not only of policy makers and researchers, but also including industry and business, NGOs, think tanks and international organisations. The 'priority' target audience is however made up of policy makers within the EU institutions and Member States.
- Statistics of the numbers of people in each of these groups do not let us know how influential the news alert is, but they do provide a general indicator of whether the service is reaching the right people. In addition, detailed questions help divide the diverse groups identified above into more specific subsets based on each subscriber's occupation, policy areas of interest, places of residence, levels of education and age.

¹ The number of subscribers represents those that were subscribed in early November 2009 when the evaluation team received the database from UWE.

1.1.2.2 Professional situation

- Policy makers at the EU, national and regional / local levels made up the largest group of subscribers completing the survey, at 36%. As shown in the chart below, 17% of these belong to national authorities, 13% work for regional / local authorities and 6% for the EU institutions.
- The next largest groups were made up of those involved in academia and research, at 26%, industry / business at 19% and NGOs / think tanks at 11%. It is therefore clear that the breakdown of respondents is in accordance with SfEP's target audience.

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes where you work?

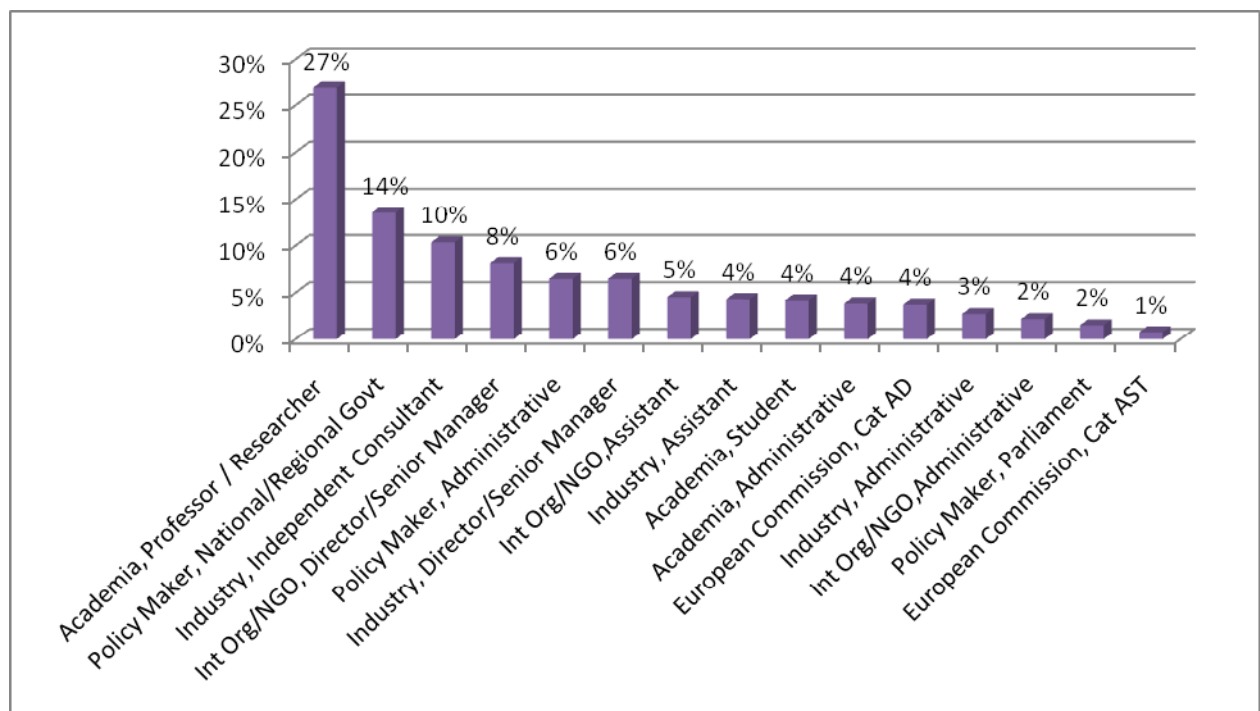


n = 1187

- Respondents were also asked to specify their professions in a bit more depth. Reaching all respondents at this level proved difficult; despite providing 16 job professional areas, about a quarter (23%) chose *Other*, making statistical analysis less straightforward.
- Among those that did specify their professional area, professors and researchers were by far the most common, at 27%. Policy makers at national / regional government came next (14%), followed by independent consultants (10%). The chart below represents this graphically, highlighting the predominance of academics. However, this does not necessarily imply that academics are much more likely than others to read the news alert. It is also possible that the academic profession was narrower and easier to pin down, while other respondents felt it necessary to note their position specifically.
- Notable is that the news alert in general appeals to people at a quite senior level:

- Within academia, professors and researchers (27%) are much more likely to receive the news alert than either students or administrators (4% each);
- Within industry, independent consultants (10%) and directors / seniors managers (6%) are more likely to receive the news alert than assistants (4%) and administrative staff (3%);
- Within international organisations / NGOs, directors / senior managers (8%) are more likely to receive the news alert than assistants (5%) or administrative staff (2%).
- Among Commission officials, AD staff (4%) are more likely than AST staff (1%) to receive the news alert.

Figure 2: Which of the following best describes your job title/position?



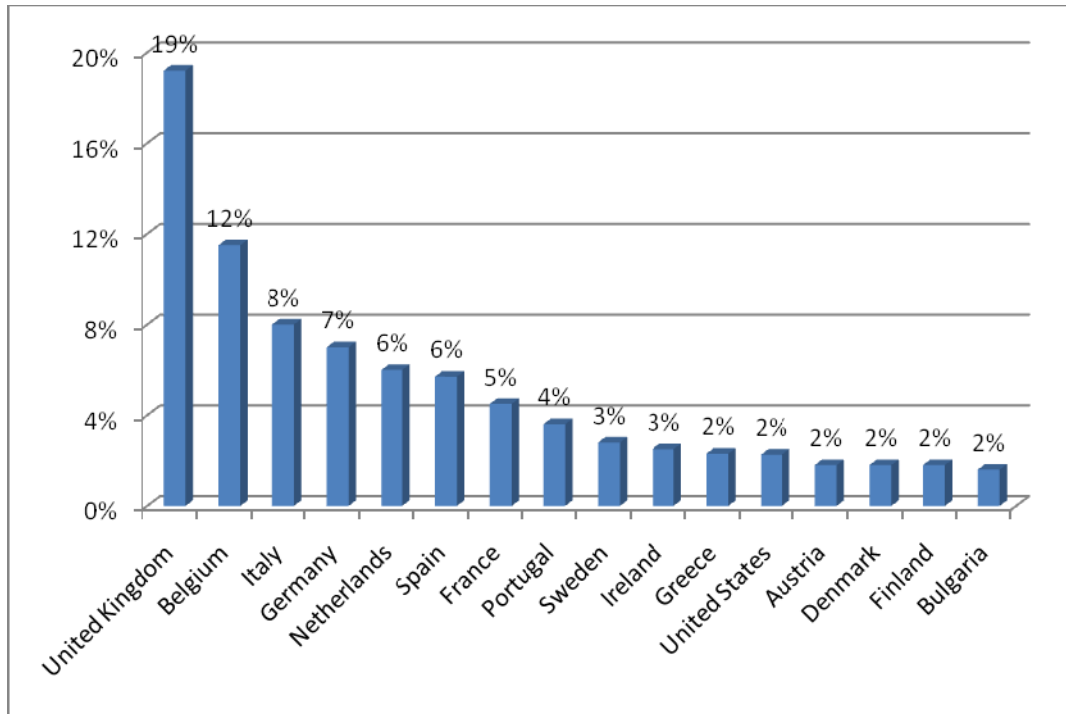
n=908

- Given their professional occupations, it is not surprising that the vast majority of respondents had attained a high level of education. Only 7% of respondents had not attained any academic degree, whereas 47% were educated to Master's level, 21% to doctoral level and 15% to post-doctoral level.

1.1.2.3 Nationality and language

- The largest plurality among respondents was clearly made up of respondents residing in the UK (19%), followed by Belgium (12%), as shown in the graph below.

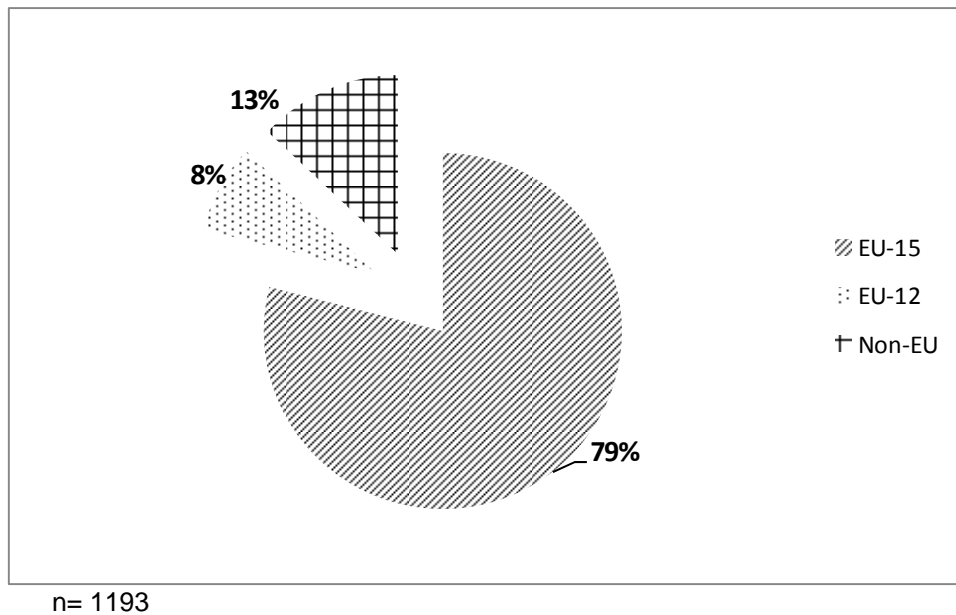
Figure 3: Where do you reside?



n=1193

- This did not seem to be due to a preponderance of any one professional group in the UK, since the professional breakdown was similar to respondents overall. The large number of respondents from Belgium, however, can be seen as a reflection of the European focus of the news alert. In Belgium, EU officials made up a large proportion of respondents (30%), as did NGO / think tank staff (16%), while national authorities (10%), regional / local authorities (10%) and researchers (10%) made up smaller proportions than for the sample as a whole.
- The high number of respondents residing in the UK does reflect the normal use of English in that country. Although a large majority (75%) of respondents claimed to use English as their normal working language (reflecting the ubiquity of English in the scientific community), some self selection bias is certainly at play; after all, those who were not comfortable in English would be unlikely to receive the news letter at all. Significant numbers of respondents also used French (18%), German (14%), Italian (10%), Dutch (10%) and Spanish (6%).
- The relatively low penetration amongst the Member States of Central and Eastern Europe has been mentioned as a concern for SfEP. This low penetration is indeed visible in the results of the survey. Over three in four respondents (79%) claimed to reside in the EU-15, while only 8% hailed from the EU-12 and 13% from outside the EU, as shown in the chart below.

Figure 4: Survey respondents by place of residence

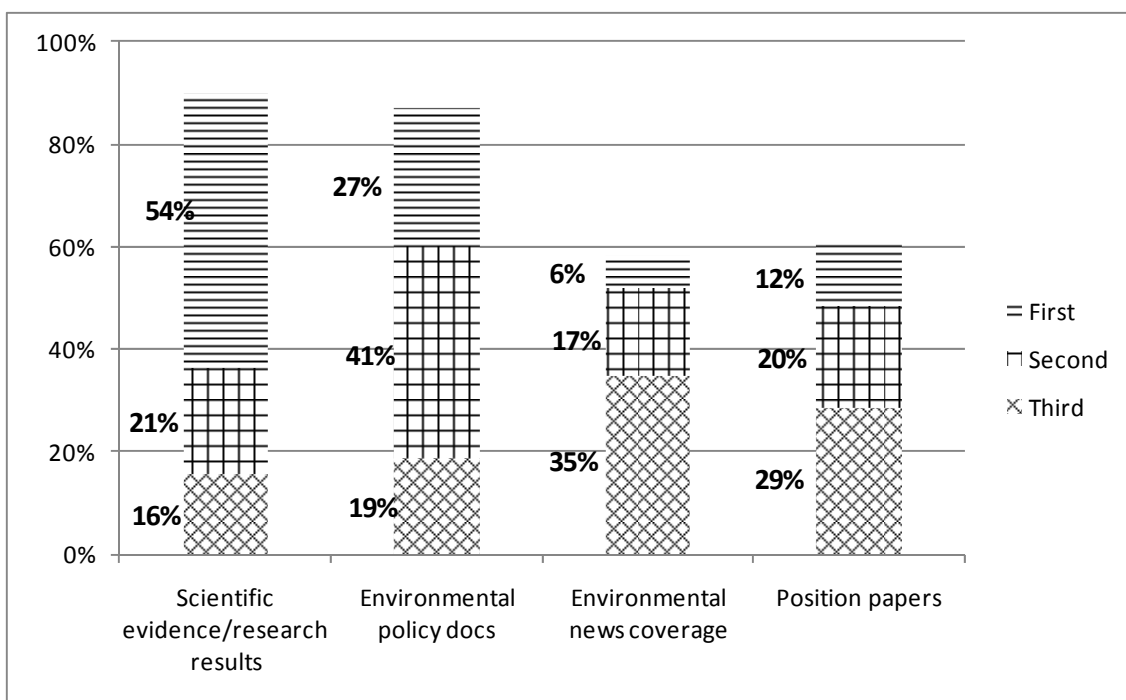


- While the result does highlight the scope for SfEP to expand within the EU-12, it must also be noted that both the population and number of scientifically trained personnel (in both absolute and relative terms) are much lower in the EU-12 than in the EU-15. According to Eurostat data, the EU-15 is about 3.5 times the size of the EU-12 in population, while per capita R&D staff is about twice as big. Taking R&D staff as an indicator of the relative size of scientific staff in general, the audience for SfEP in the EU-12 should only be about 1/7 the size of its audience in the EU-15. Extrapolating from responses to the survey shows that the current proportion of subscribers from the EU-12 is not far off this figure (i.e. 8% of respondents to the survey rather than 11%).

1.1.2.4 Background information

- To establish a baseline of respondents' needs and their usual sources of information, they were asked to provide some basic, but crucial, information. Firstly subscribers were asked to comment on rank the types of information they generally need on environment issues. *Scientific evidence / research results* was by far the most commonly needed type of information, with 54% of respondents ranking it most important, followed by *environmental policy documents*, at 27%. *Environmental policy documents* are also the most favoured second choice, at 41%, as shown in the following chart. *Environmental news coverage* and *position papers* are not nearly as high priorities for respondents, as shown in the chart below.

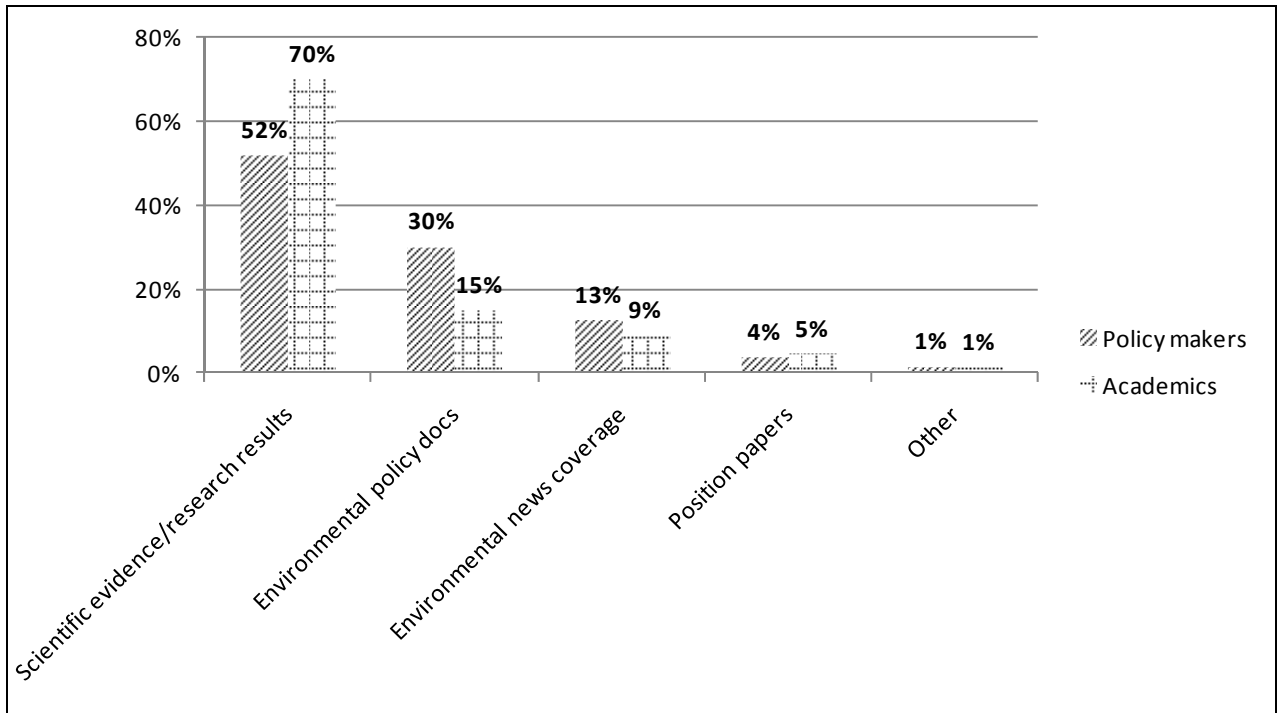
Figure 5: Which types of information do you generally need on environmental issues?



n= 1268

- Types of information needed on environmental issues were not, however, consistent across different professional areas. Most notably, policy makers and those involved in academia and research diverged in their informational needs, highlighting the difficult inherent in appealing to diverse target audiences at the same time. While both policy makers and academics listed *new scientific evidence / results of research projects* as the most important type of information they needed on environmental issues, the preference was significantly greater among academics and researchers (70% versus 52%). In a similar vein, policy makers voiced twice as great a preference for *environmental policy documents* (30%) as did academics (15%), as illustrated in the chart below.

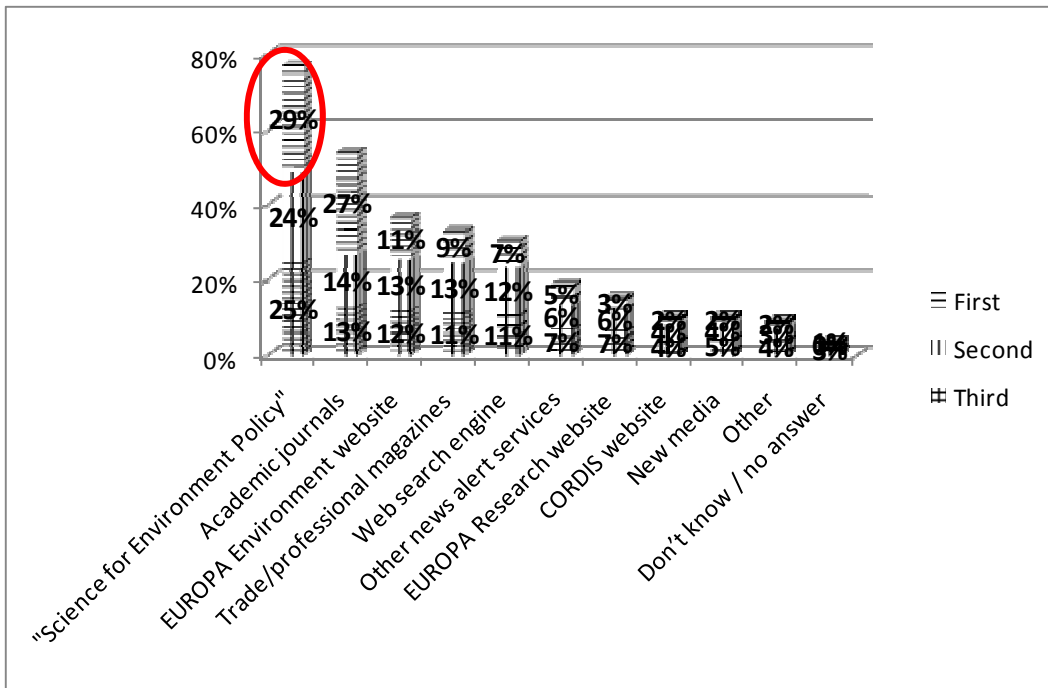
Figure 6: Which type of information do you generally need on environmental issues? (by profession)



n= 422 policy makers, 318 academics

- Respondents were also asked to comment on their three most used sources of new scientific information on environmental issues. Taking into account first, second and third choices, *SfEP* (78%) was the most chosen source of information by a wide margin. *Academic journals*, at 54%, were next, followed by *trade / professional magazines* (33%), *web search engines* (30%), and the *Europa Environment website* (26%). While this result might be expected from subscribers to the news alert who took time to complete a survey, it is encouraging. The chart below summarises responses, clearly showing that subscribers rely on *SfEP* more than other sources.

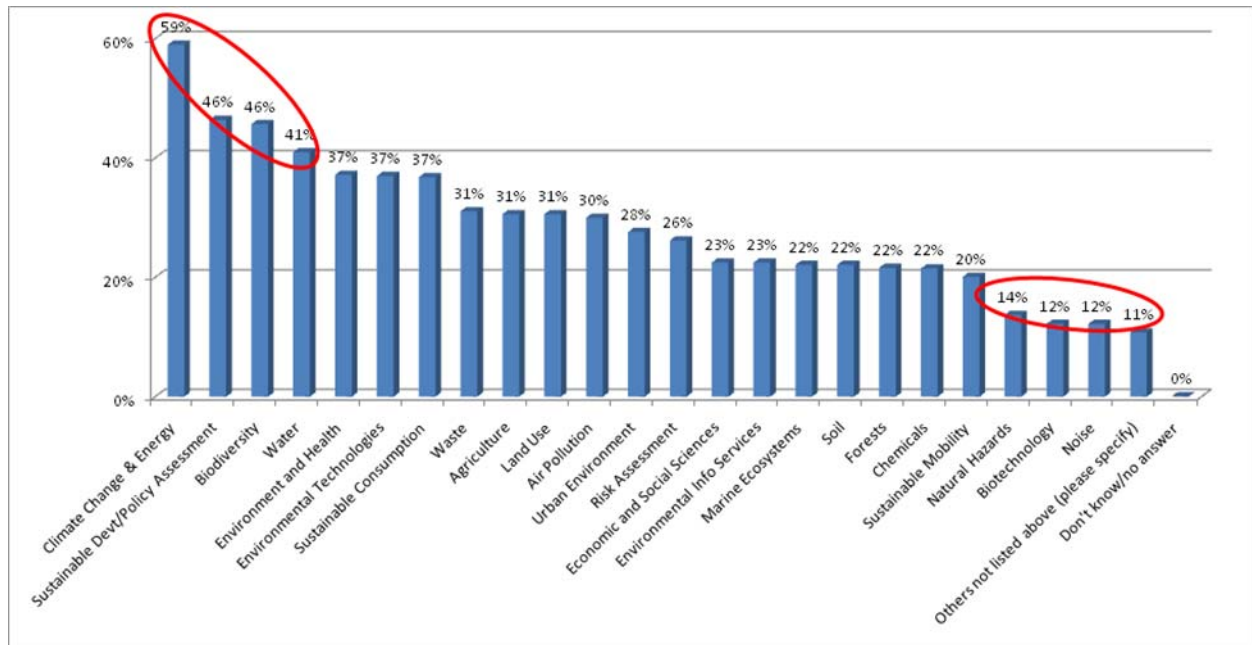
Figure 7: Which of these sources do you usually access to get new scientific information on environmental issues?



n= 1269

- Respondents also gave an overview of the environmental fields that most interested them. *Climate change and energy* (59%) were the most often cited, while *sustainable development and policy assessment* (46%), *biodiversity* (46%), *water* (41%), *environment and health*, *environmental technologies* and *sustainable consumption* (all at 37%) were also given high priority. *Natural hazards* (14%), *biotechnology* and *noise* (12% each) were considered relatively unimportant by respondents, as depicted in the graph below. This reflects the wide appeal of cross-cutting issues, while more singular disciplines are perhaps more favoured by specialists.

Figure 8: Could you let us know your main areas of environmental interest?

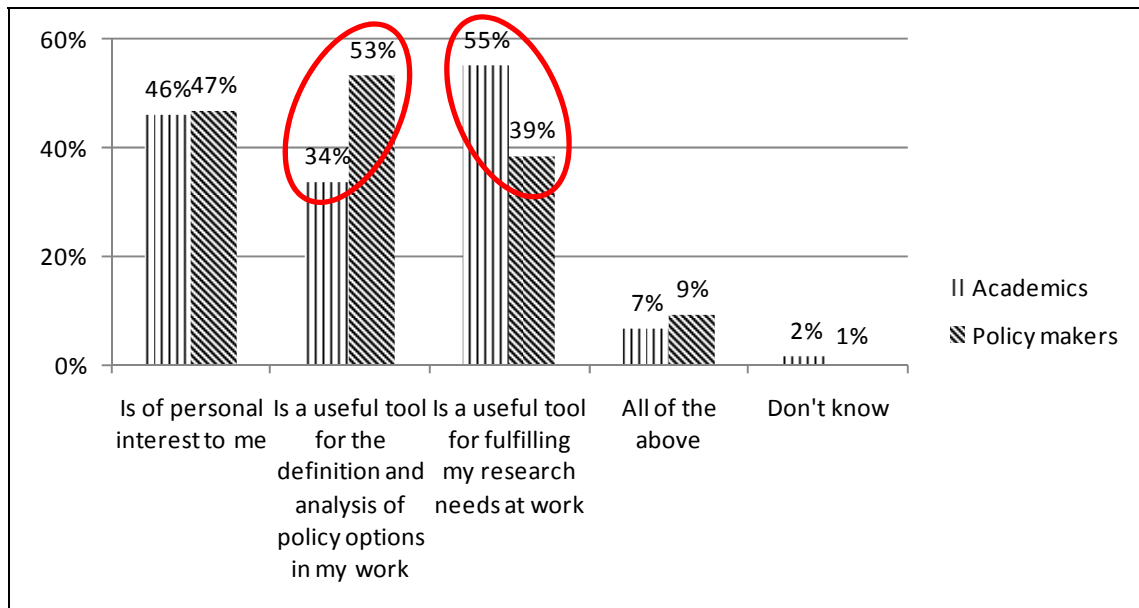


n= 1211

1.1.2.5 Reading habits

- Asked to describe why they subscribed to the service, readers in about equal measure stated that they used the news alert out of *personal interest* (50%), *defining and analysing policy options* (48%) and *fulfilling research needs* (47%). About 9% of subscribers subscribed to the service for all three of these reasons.
- There were important differences between different groups of subscribers, however. Most importantly, though perhaps not surprisingly, policy makers were much more likely than academics to use SfEP as *a useful tool for the definition and analysis of policy options in my work* (53% versus 34%). Academics were more likely to find the news alert *a useful tool for fulfilling my research needs at work* (55% versus 39%). These differences, illustrated in the chart below, highlight the difficulty in appealing to both of these groups at once. It appears that policy *and* science interest all subscribers, but not to the same degree.

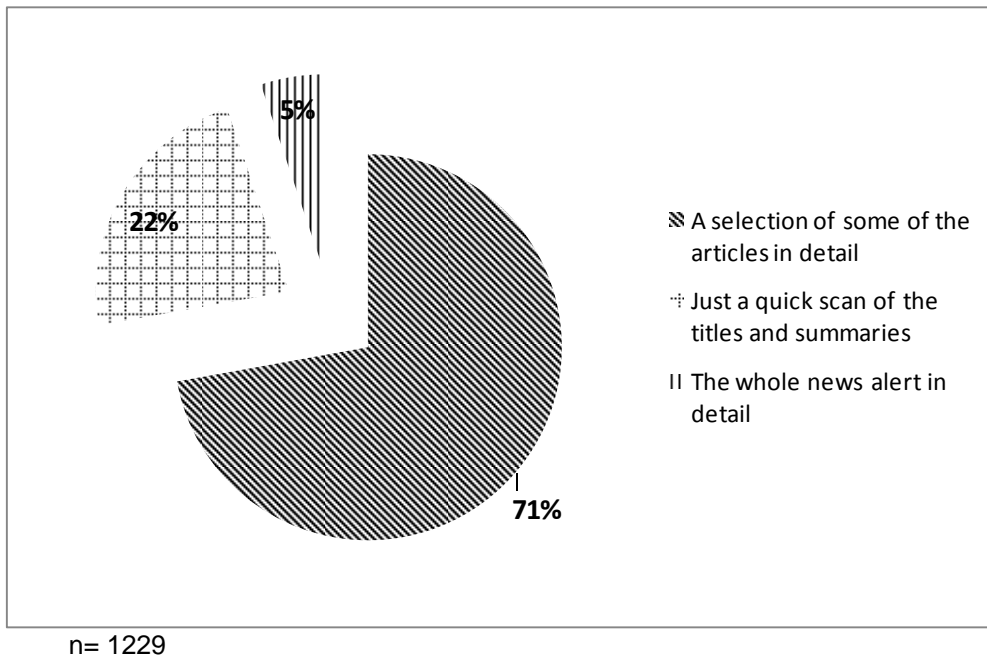
Figure 9: Which of the following statements best describes why you are subscribed to SfEP? (broken down by professional area)



n= 422 policy makers, 318 academics

- The majority of subscribers that did use SfEP for their work then provided more specific information on the stages of the policy-making process (either *conception*, *implementation* or *review*) for which they found SfEP most important. The largest group of respondents chose *all of the above* (34%), indicating that subscribers find a wide range of relevant policy-related information in SfEP, while 20% concentrated on the *conception* stage, 15% on *review* and 8% on *implementation*. Though the preference is not overwhelming, responses are in general in line with SfEP's effort to provide information on research that is relevant for new environmental policies.
- Reading habits also validate the structure of the news alert, which provides short summaries followed by more in depth articles. Nearly three in four respondents (71%) read *a selection of some of the articles in detail*, presumably after checking the summaries for relevant material. Just under a quarter of subscribers (21%) performed *just a quick scan of the titles and summaries*, while 5% read *the whole news alert in detail*, as shown in the chart below.

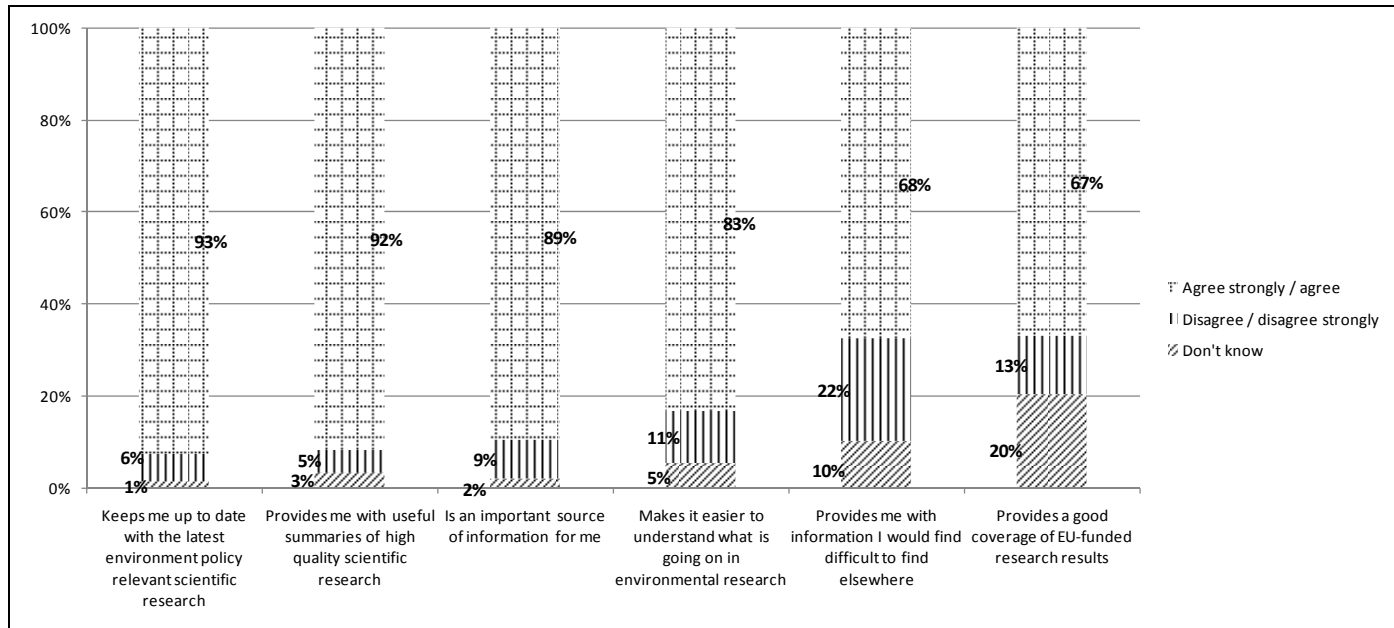
Figure 10: How much of the News Alert service do you usually read?



1.1.2.6 Content of the service

- Subscribers expressed high degrees of satisfaction with the content of the service, as evidenced in their responses to questions that approached the issue from several angles. As shown in the chart below, subscribers were very much in agreement with statements relating to the importance of the news alert for them. The vast majority of respondents also found the news alert to *keep them up to date with the latest environment policy relevant scientific research* (93%), that it *provides useful summaries of high quality scientific research* (92%) and that the news alert *makes it easier to understand what is going on in environmental research* (83%).
- Large, but slightly smaller majorities, found the news alert to *provide information difficult to find elsewhere* (67%) and to *provide good coverage of EU-funded research results* (67%). This last point deserves special mention, because it is debated elsewhere in this report whether providing coverage of EU-funded research should be a focus of the news alert or not.

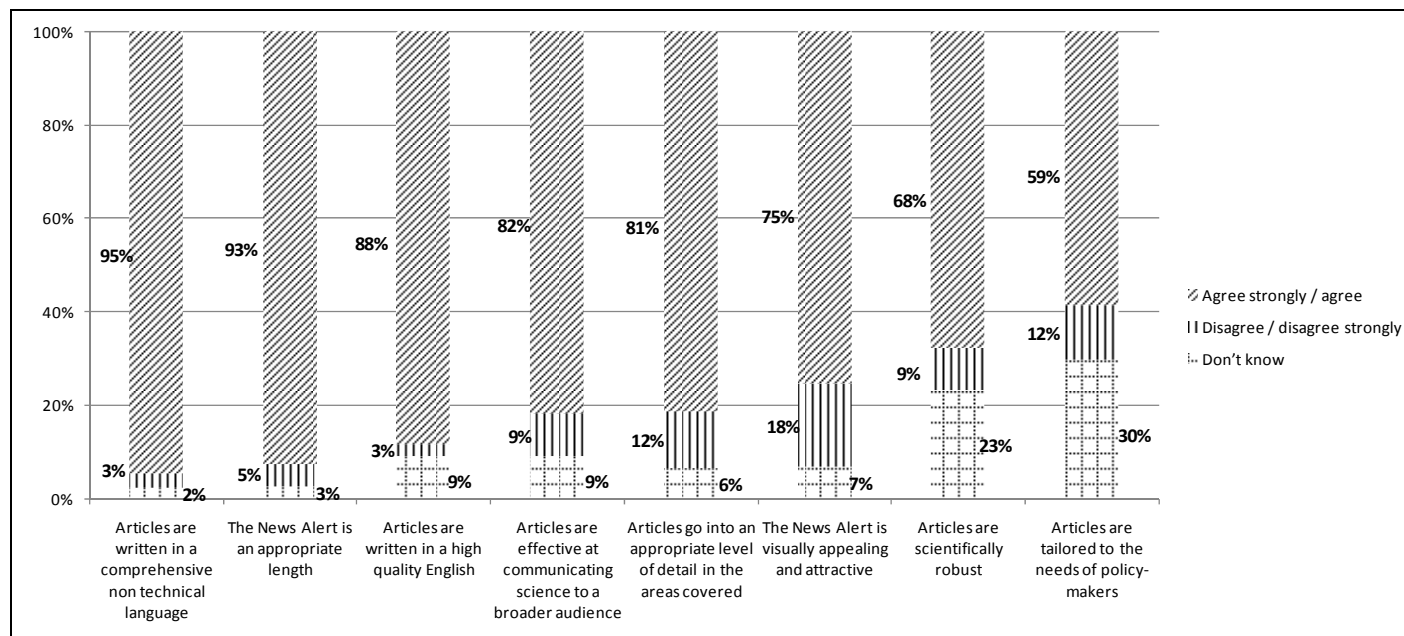
Figure 11: Please give your views on the content of the News Alert service. SfEP...



n= 1209

- More specific questions about the features of the service yielded even more positive responses. The basic format and quality of the news alert received the highest scores. For example, 95% of respondents agreed that SfEP was *written in a comprehensive, non technical language*, 93% found it to be *the appropriate length*, 88% found it to be *written in a high quality English*, 82% considered *the articles effective at communicating science to a broader audience*, and 81% agreed that *the articles go into an appropriate level of detail in the areas covered*.
- Though positive in their overall view, respondents were less sanguine regarding the visual appeal, scientific credibility and policy-making utility of the news alert. Three in four respondents agreed that the format of the news alert was *visually appealing and attractive*, while 68% found the *articles scientifically robust*. Only 59% agreed that the news alert was *tailored to the needs of policy makers*, highlighting the point made elsewhere in this report that more needs to be done to exploit its niche and increase the usefulness of SfEP for its priority audience, which is made up of policy makers rather than researchers.

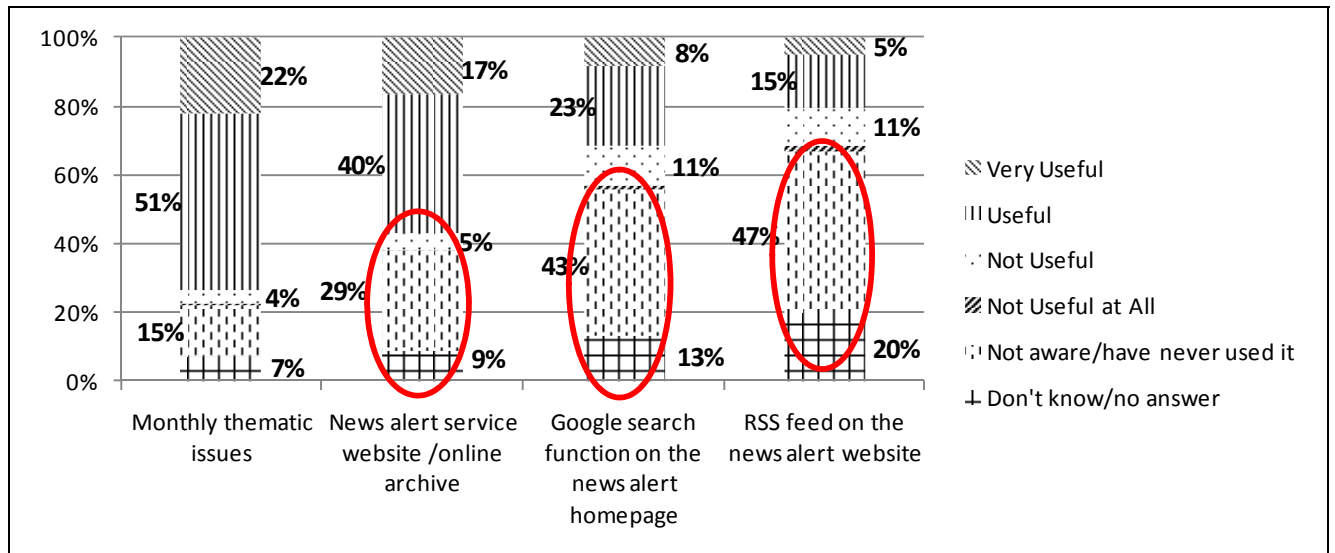
Figure 12: Please give you views on other features of the News Alert service.



n= 1227

- Aside from the montly thematic issues (treated in more depth below), and the partial exception of the website / online archive, features of the news alert outside its core function (i.e. providing subscribers via email with six diverse articles per week) are little utilised. Almost one in three respondents (29%), for example, is unaware of of the *news alert service website / online archive*. Only 31% of subscribers found the google search function useful, while 43% were either unaware it existed or had never used it. Uptake of the website's RSS feed (admittedly only recently launched) was even lower, with 20% of respondents finding it useful and fully 67% either unaware of the feature or unsure of their answer, as shown in the chart below.

Figure 13: Could you please rate how useful the additional services of the News Alert are to you?

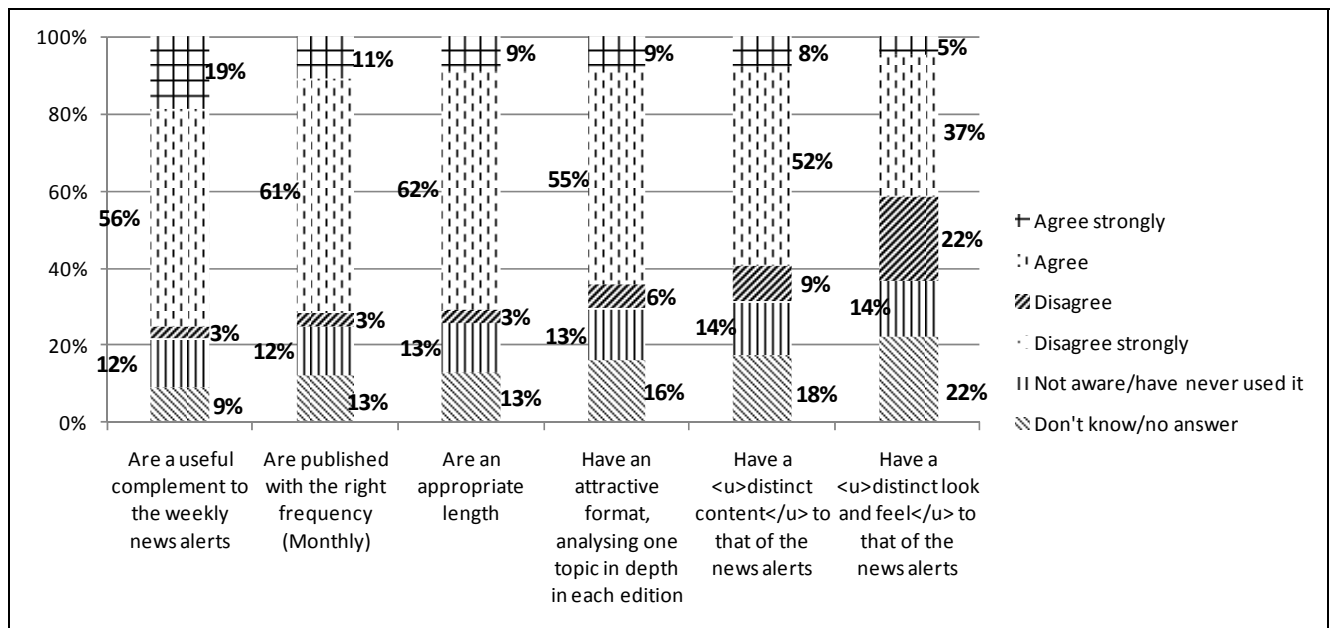


n= 1212

1.1.2.7 Monthly thematic issues

- As shown above, 73% of subscribers found the monthly thematic issues either *very useful* or *useful*. More specifically, three in four respondents (75%) agreed that the thematic issues *are a useful complement to the weekly news alerts*. Though about 12% of respondents were unaware of the thematic issues, hardly any disagreed with the statement (3%). The format and frequency attracted similar enthusiasm, with 72% finding the news alert to be *published with the right frequency*, 71% considering it *the appropriate length* and 64% finding it to have *an attractive format, analysing one topic in depth in each edition*. Though six in 10 respondents did find the *content* distinct from the regular news alerts, far more were unsure that the *look and feel* of the thematic issues were distinct. While 42% did agree that the *look and feel* were distinct, 58% either disagreed with the statement, were unaware of the monthly thematic issues or unsure of their response.
- The chart below summarises respondents' views on the monthly thematic issues. While it is encouraging that the overall usefulness and format are appreciated, respondents did not appear to find the thematic issues to be very distinct from the regular news alert. Although it is debatable whether distinctive thematic issues should be a priority for DG ENV, it is relatively clear that is not being achieved currently.

Figure 14: Please give your views on some features of the monthly thematic issues. The monthly thematic issues...



n= 1171

1.1.2.8 Overall views of the service

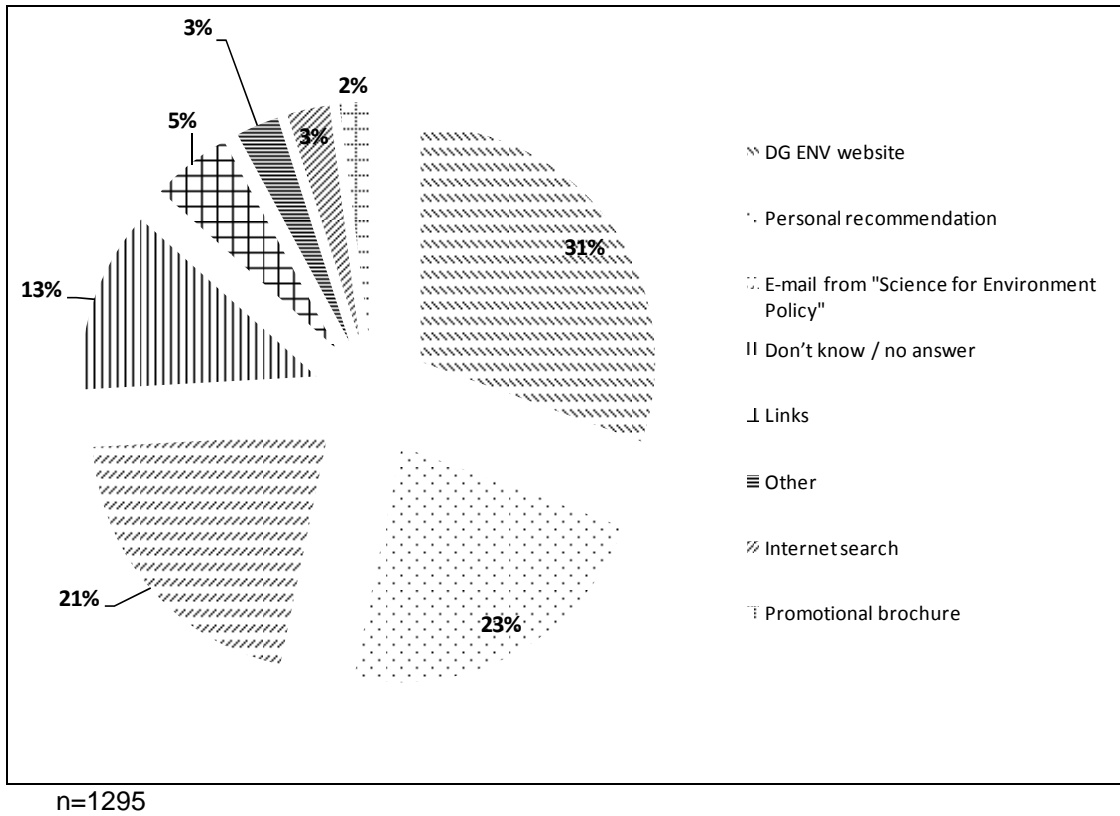
- Overall views of SfEP were very positive. Indeed, 97% claimed to find the service *useful*, including 38% who considered it *very useful*. This perceived usefulness appears to be at least partially driven by the apparent uniqueness of the news alert. Asked to provide the names of any similar services they could think of, only 20% responded. Of the other services mentioned, the vast majority were very specialised journals doubtlessly in the specific subject area for given subscribers. ENDS, at 11% of responses, the EEA Notification Service, at 4% and Euractiv, at 2.5%, were the only other services mentioned in significant frequency. Given that none of the three provide the same blend of scientific research results and environmental policy, these responses bolster the view of SfEP as a truly unique service.
- Respondents were also asked to explain what these other services provide that is different from SfEP. Several remarked that SfEP provided a better service, but that it was more focused on science than newsletters such as ENDS. Other services were also seen as providing information more consistently related to specific fields of expertise or countries, or providing updates on conferences and calls for tender, which are outside of SfEP's remit.

1.1.2.9 Promotion of the service

- DG ENV has highlighted for the evaluators the priority it places on increasing SfEP's readership, especially among key target audiences. To get a better idea of which promotional methods have been successful in the past, and to unearth some ideas for future improvement, respondents were asked to comment on how they found out about the service and whether they have recommended it to others.
- Though SfEP has been pursuing an elaborate promotional strategy that entails targeted mailings and leaflets, it was clear that respondents to the survey had heard about the news alert in via more conventional means. As shown in the chart below, nearly a third of

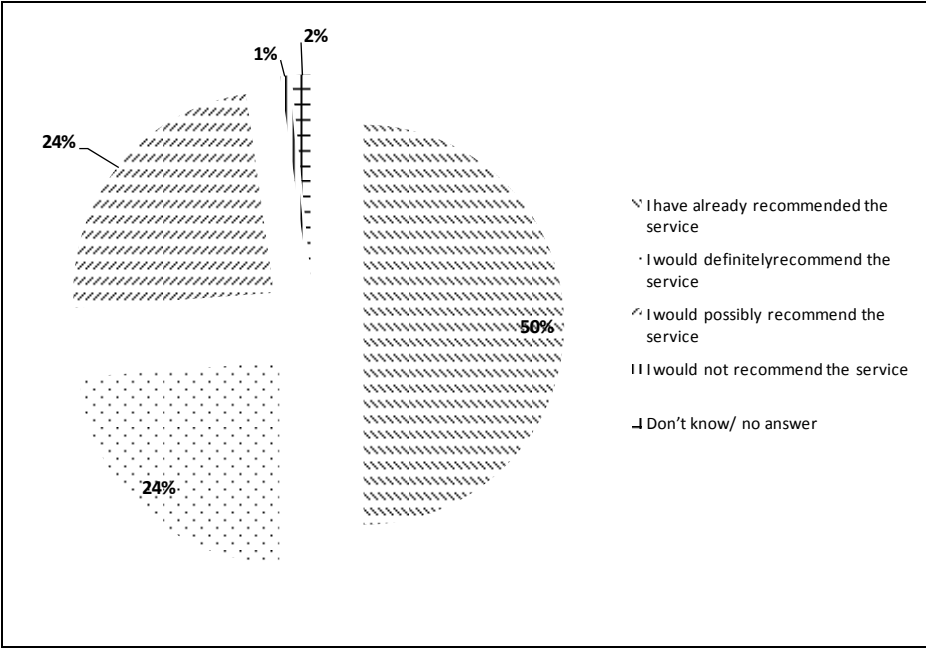
respondents (31%) found out about the news alert from the DG ENV website, while a further 23% had it recommended to them personally. Mailings from SfEP were also significant, at 21%. Links from other websites, at 5%, were not a major source of subscriptions, though it was notable that 13% of respondents did not know how they had first found out about SfEP.

Figure 15: How did you first hear about Science for Environment Policy?



- The strength of personal recommendations was also evident when respondents were asked whether they had or would recommend the service. Half claimed to have already recommended the service, while almost a quarter (24%) stated they would definitely do so. About another quarter (24%) would possibly recommend the service, while only 1% would not.

Figure 16: Would you recommend the service to friends and colleagues?



n= 1214

1.2 Online survey with potential subscribers to the service

1.2.1 Overview

Continuing to increase SfEP's subscriber base is a priority for DG ENV. Exploring effective methods of promotion is necessary, but only goes part of the way towards achieving the goal; it is also important to identify the needs and habits of *potential subscribers*, i.e. those who fit into SfEP's target groups but for one reason or another have not signed up.

In order to get a better idea of the content and features that might interest potential subscribers, the evaluation team addressed them with a survey. Though the potential sampling size is huge, there are many inherent difficulties in reaching such a disparate group. No contact information was available for potential subscribers, meaning that the evaluators were reliant on online promotion. This was carried out on several websites, including SfEP (which potential subscribers were not very likely to access), the European Environment Agency, Cordis Wire and Eionet. Unfortunately, several weeks after launching the survey there were very few responses. This led the evaluators to pursue a more active form of promotion. A link to the survey for potential subscribers was sent to all subscribers to the service, asking them to forward it on to friends and colleagues they thought might be interested. In addition, a short quiz was included in the promotional email, motivating potential subscribers (unlike subscribers to the service, potential subscribers were not invested in the news alert and had no particular interest in helping to improve it) to participate. This was far more successful, accounting for about 70% of respondents.

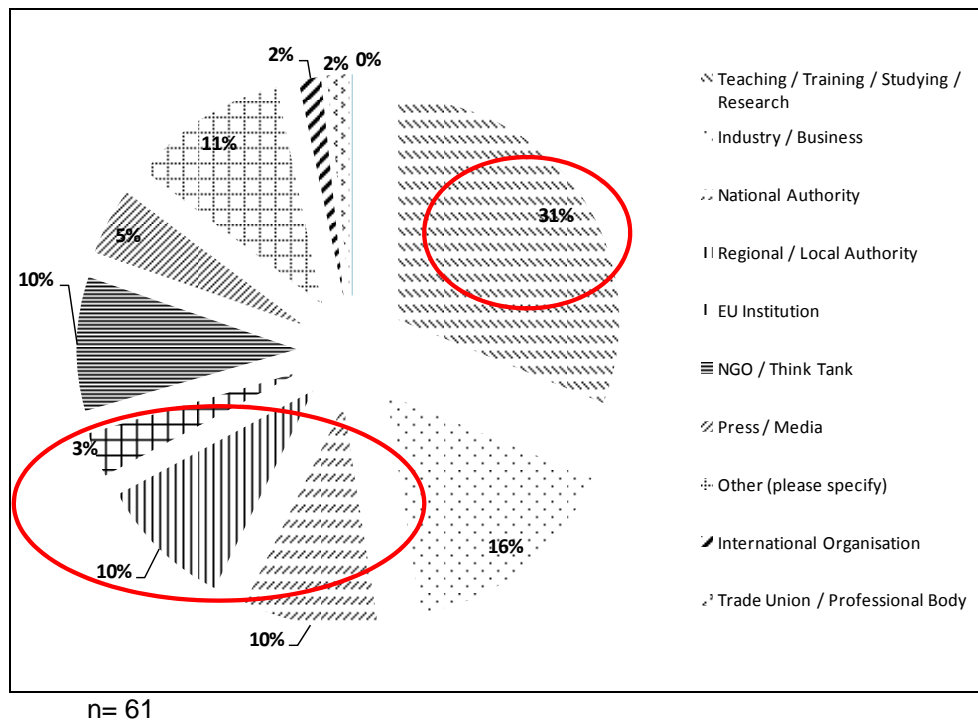
1.2.2 Summary of key findings

1.2.2.1 Respondent profiles

In all 73 potential subscribers responded to the survey. This is not a large enough number of respondents to allow for any conclusions of statistical significance to be drawn. However, there are enough responses to provide some general ideas of what potential subscribers might be. The analysis given in this section must therefore not be read as indicative of potential subscribers in general, but as a description of the opinions of a sample of individual potential subscribers.

Potential subscribers responding to the survey were more heavily dominated by academics and researchers than was the survey for subscribers. As shown in the chart below, nearly one in three respondents were in the *teaching / training / studying / research* fields. The combined policy maker fields only made up 23% of respondents, while *industry / business* accounted for 16%.

Figure 17: Which of the following best describes where you work?

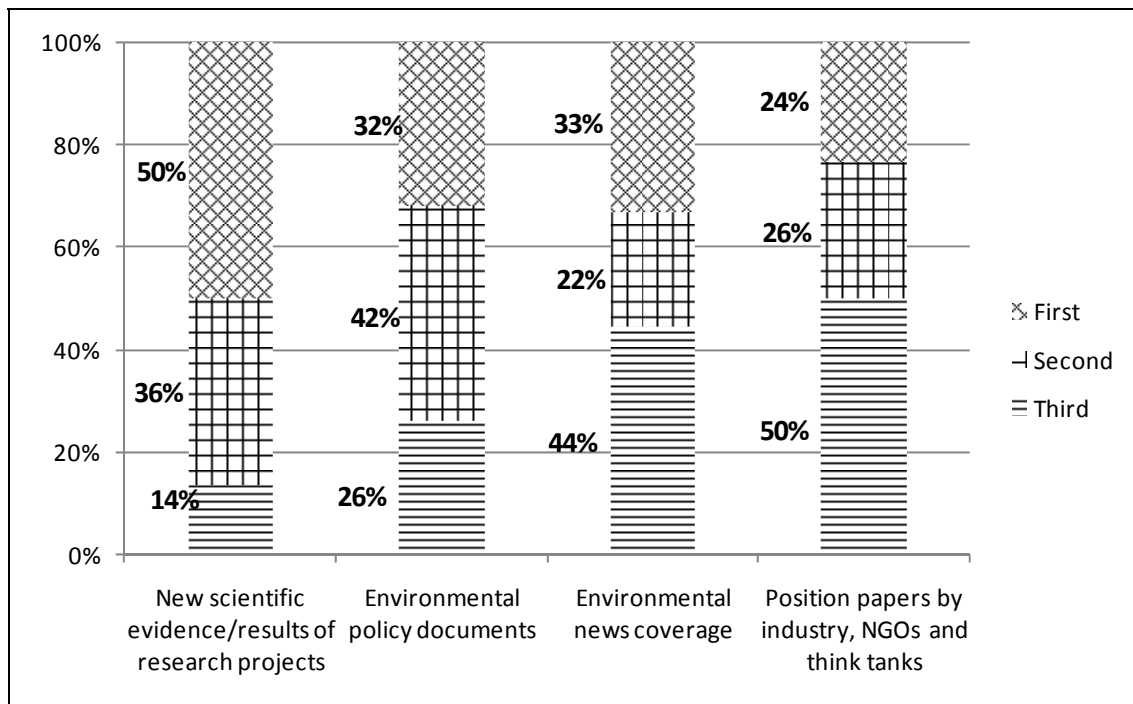


Potential subscribers were also highly educated, with nearly one in three (31%) having educated to PhD level or beyond, and 43% possessing Master's degrees. They were comfortable working in English, with 66% using it as their primary working language.

1.2.2.2 Environmental research needs

Asked to rank their three most needed types of information on environmental issues, potential subscribers expressed the greatest need for information on *new scientific evidence / results of research projects*, with half of respondents ranking it most important, while *Environmental policy documents* (32%), *environmental news coverage* (33%) and *position papers by industry, NGOs and think tanks* (24%) followed.

Figure 18: Which types of information do you most generally need on environmental issues?

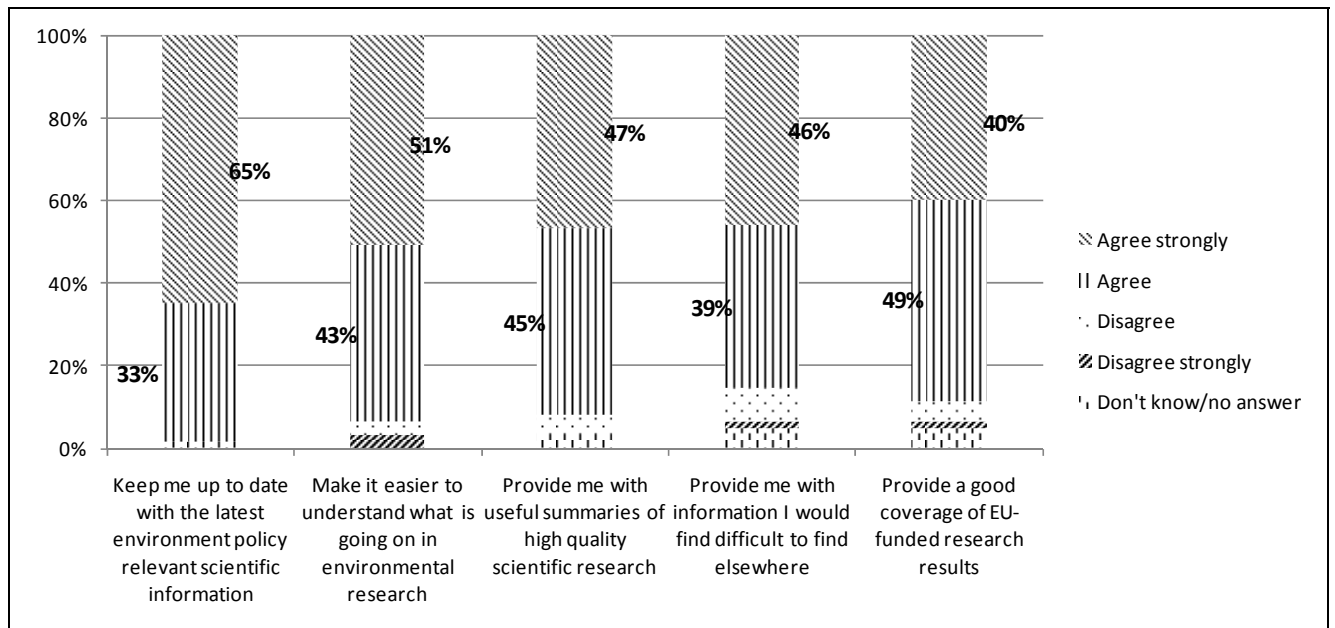


n=67

The most commonly cited ways of receiving such information were *academic journals* (42%), followed by the *Europa DG Environment website* (35%) and *web search engines* (28%). Given that SfEP draws heavily on scientific journals, it is highly possible the individuals in the sample of potential subscribers would be interested in the information contained in the news alert. A significant proportion of potential subscribers (22%) also chose *other environmental news alert services*, and specified ENDS Daily, EDIE and Euractiv. Three potential subscribers also responded *Science for Environment Policy*, implying that they read the news alert online rather than receiving the weekly email.

Like subscribers to the news alert, potential subscribers were of the opinion that an environmental news alert service should *keep me up to date with the latest environment policy relevant scientific information*. Nearly two in three potential subscribers (65%) strongly agreed with this statement, an encouraging sign for SfEP. A majority of potential subscribers (51%) also strongly agreed that an environmental news alert service should *make it easier to understand what is going on in environmental research*.

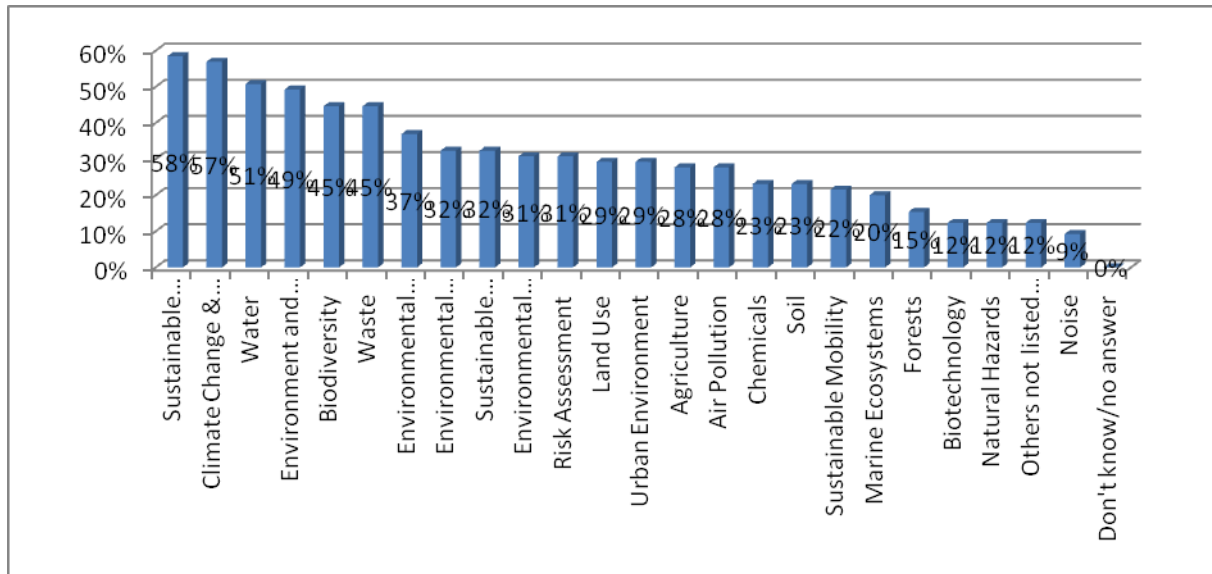
Figure 19: In your opinion, how important do you think it is for an environmental news service to offer the following features? An environmental news service should...



n= 67

Like subscribers, potential subscribers were interested in a wide range of environmental policy areas, most notably *sustainable development and policy assessment* (58%), *climate change and energy* (57%), *water* (51%), *environment and health* (49%), *biodiversity* (45%) and *waste* (45%). *Forests* (15%), *biotechnology* (12%), *natural hazards* (12%) and *noise* (9%) were seen as relatively less important, as reflected in the chart below.

Figure 20: Main areas of environmental interest

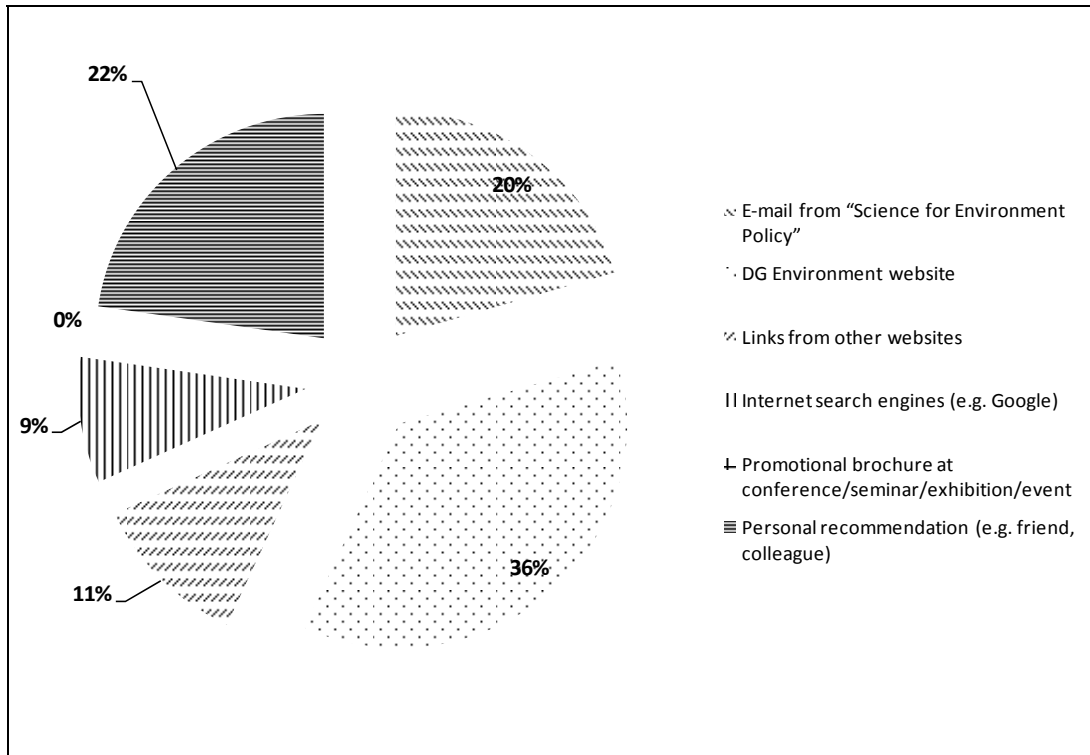


n= 65

1.2.2.3 Opinions of SfEP

Six in 10 respondents (60%) had already heard of SfEP before taking the survey. Like subscribers, they were most likely to have heard of the news alert from the *DG ENV website*, *personal recommendations* or *promotional email from SfEP*. This reinforces a point made in the section on the subscriber survey, that traditional sources of promotion, such as word of mouth and identifying key officials for targeted emails, play a more important role in successful promotion than any potential 'silver bullet'.

Figure 21: How did you first hear about SfEP?



Over half of those that were aware of the survey found it *very useful* (53%), while 31% found it *useful* and only 13% found it *not very useful*. This begs the question of why these individuals are not already subscribed, but it reinforces the generally positive opinions identified in the subscriber survey. Nearly three in four subscribers (74%) also expressed interest in receiving more information on the news alert, while only 15% did not.