



# 2021 Wisconsin Recycling Household Survey Results

Waste and Materials Management Program, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources  
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The Department of Natural Resources' 2021 statewide household recycling survey was administered by the UW-Madison Survey Center. In April 2021, UWSC mailed an 8-page questionnaire to 2,000 randomly sampled Wisconsin residential addresses. Respondents received up to three mailings (initial questionnaire with \$2 incentive, reminder postcard and one additional questionnaire mailing without incentive). Collection of completed surveys ended July 2, 2021.

UWSC received a total of 950 questionnaires with the majority of questions answered. With 42 undeliverable or vacant addresses removed from the sample, the survey response rate was 48%. This was slightly lower than previous surveys.

This document summarizes responses to each survey question. Unless otherwise noted, the percentages shown reflect the number of respondents who selected a response option, divided by the total number of respondents who answered the question. Email [DNRWasteMaterials@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DNRWasteMaterials@wisconsin.gov) if you have questions.

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## Q1. In the last 12 months, did your local community offer...

Service type	% of respondents		
	Yes	No	Not sure
Curbside pickup of trash	84%	13%	3%
Curbside pickup of recycling	80%	15%	5%
Curbside pickup of yard waste	49%	39%	12%

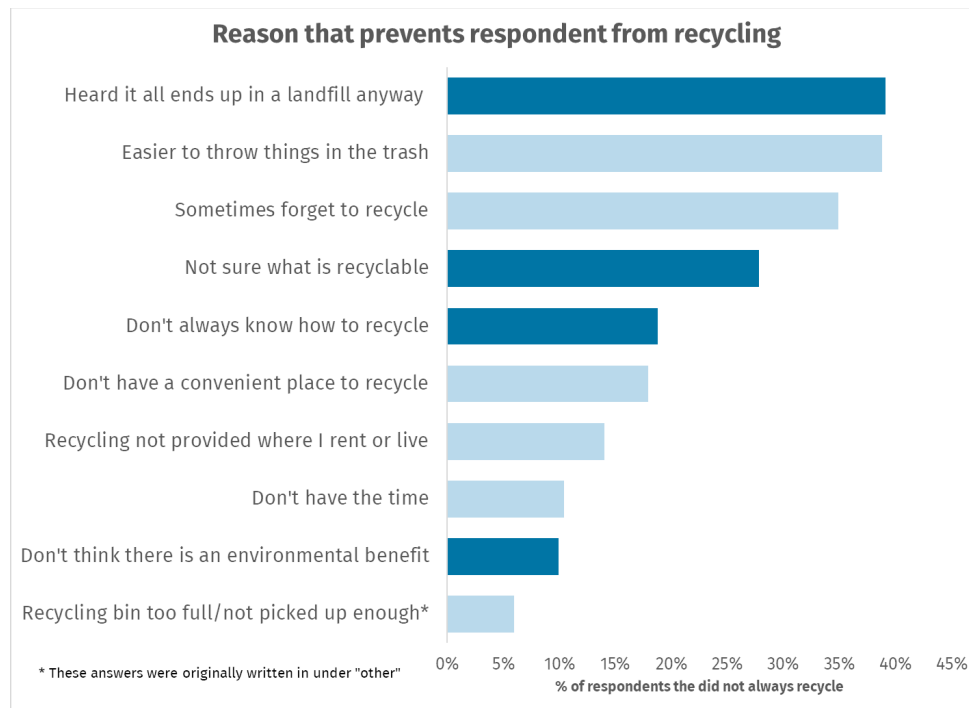
## Q2. Do any of the following reasons prevent you from recycling items like cans, bottles, paper or cardboard?

About 61% of respondents answered that they always recycle, so none of the reasons listed applied. About 35% of respondents provided a reason they were unable to recycle items like cans, bottles, cardboard or paper. (About 5% of respondents didn't answer this question.)

This was a "check all that apply" question, so respondents could select more than one reason. Among those that selected "some other reason," the most common was because their recycling/cart bin got full (often because it was picked up only biweekly or monthly). Twenty respondents gave this as an answer. The other common response was that some items (containers) were sometimes too difficult to clean out enough. Eight respondents provided this response.

Reason that prevents recycling	% of respondents
Not sure what is recyclable	28%
Do not always know how to recycle	19%
Do not have the time	10%
Do not have a convenient place to recycle	18%
Recycling is not provided where I rent or live	14%
I sometimes forget to recycle	35%
Just easier to throw things in the trash	39%
Do not think there is an environmental benefit	10%
Heard it all ends up in a landfill	39%
Some other reason	13%

In the chart below, the darker bars are barriers that could be directly addressed by outreach.



**Q3. Wisconsin's state recycling law has been in place since 1990. The recycling law requires communities to have recycling programs, and bans recyclable items from landfills. Before reading the above statement, were you aware that Wisconsin law says...**

Law component	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
...communities must have recycling programs?	53%	47%
...recyclable bottles, cans and paper cannot be landfilled as trash?	49%	51%
...that all multi-family and non-residential facilities and properties must provide separate containers for trash and recycling?	55%	45%

#### Q4. In the last 12 months, have you received any information about recycling from the following sources?

About 71% of respondents had received recycling information. The table shows the percentages of the 677 respondents who received information. This was a “check all that apply” question, so respondents could select more than one source.

Source	% of respondents
Local government	71%
News story	36%
Waste hauler	28%
Social media	26%
Friends or neighbors	12%
Landlord or apartment management company	11%
School-age child bringing home info	9%
Other	4%

#### Q5. In general, how concerned are you about the effects of burning trash on your health?

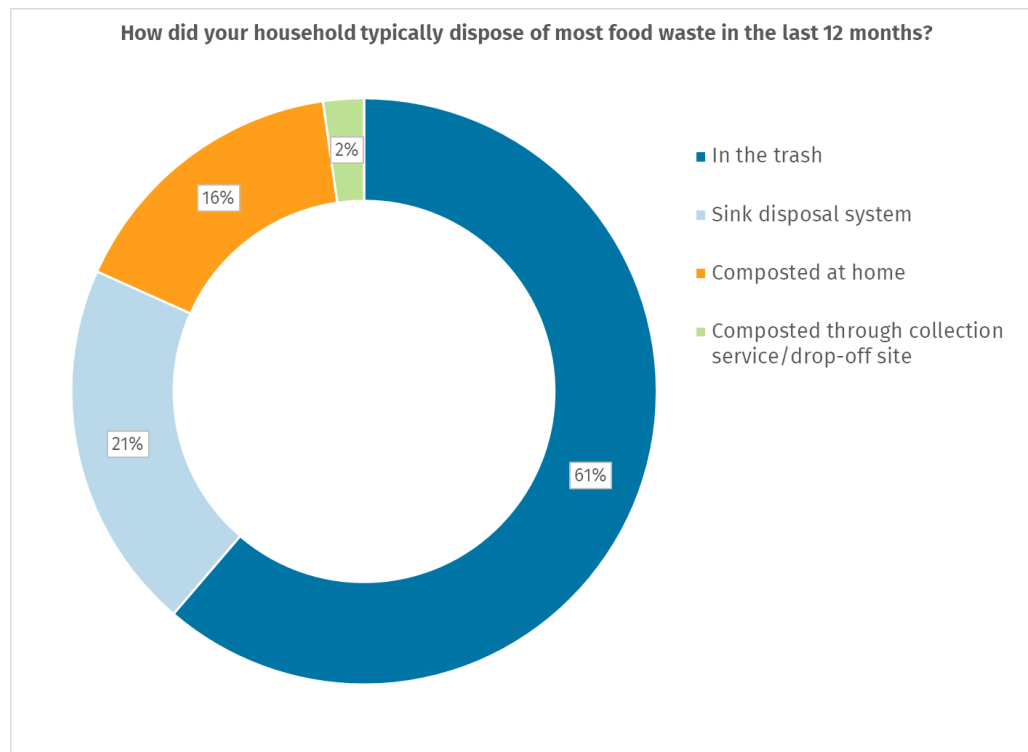
Level of concern	% of respondents
Not at all concerned	11%
Not too concerned	21%
Somewhat concerned	33%
Very concerned	22%
Extremely concerned	13%

#### Q6. In the last 12 months, did you burn any of the following?

Material	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
Leaves, grass, or brush	30%	70%
Recyclable materials such as plastic, glass bottles, paper products or cans	7%	93%
Garbage	3%	97%

**Q7. Which one of the following best describes how your household typically disposed of most food waste in the last 12 months?**

Disposal method	% of respondents
My household put most food waste in the trash	61%
My household used a sink disposal system for most food waste	20%
My household composted most food waste ourselves at home	16%
My household composted most food waste through a drop-off site	0.4%
My household composted most food waste through a collection service	2%



**Q8. In general, how willing would you be to separate food waste from the rest of your household's trash, if you had access to a program that allowed you to keep this waste out of landfills through composting or another means?**

Level of willingness	% of respondents
Not sure	11%
Not at all willing	6%
Not too willing	8%
Somewhat willing	30%
Very willing	26%
Extremely willing	21%



**Q9. In the last 12 months, which disposal method did you use most often for each of the following household items that you no longer wanted?**

The right-hand column in the table below shows the percent of all respondents who had disposed of the material in some way in the past 12 months. The three middle columns show the disposal choices made by those respondents.

Material	Put in trash	Took to drop-off site	Stored	% of respondents who disposed of material
Household batteries	62%	29%	9%	85%
Fluorescent bulbs including CFLs	49%	40%	11%	57%
Mercury thermometers or thermostats	2%	8%	3%	13%
Medical sharps (needles, syringes & lancets)	14%	69%	17%	25%
Tires	2%	84%	14%	34%

**Q10. In the last 12 months, which disposal method did you use most often for each of the following other household items that you no longer wanted?**

The right-hand column in the table below shows the percent of all respondents who had disposed of the material in some way in the past 12 months. The four middle columns show the disposal choices made by those respondents.

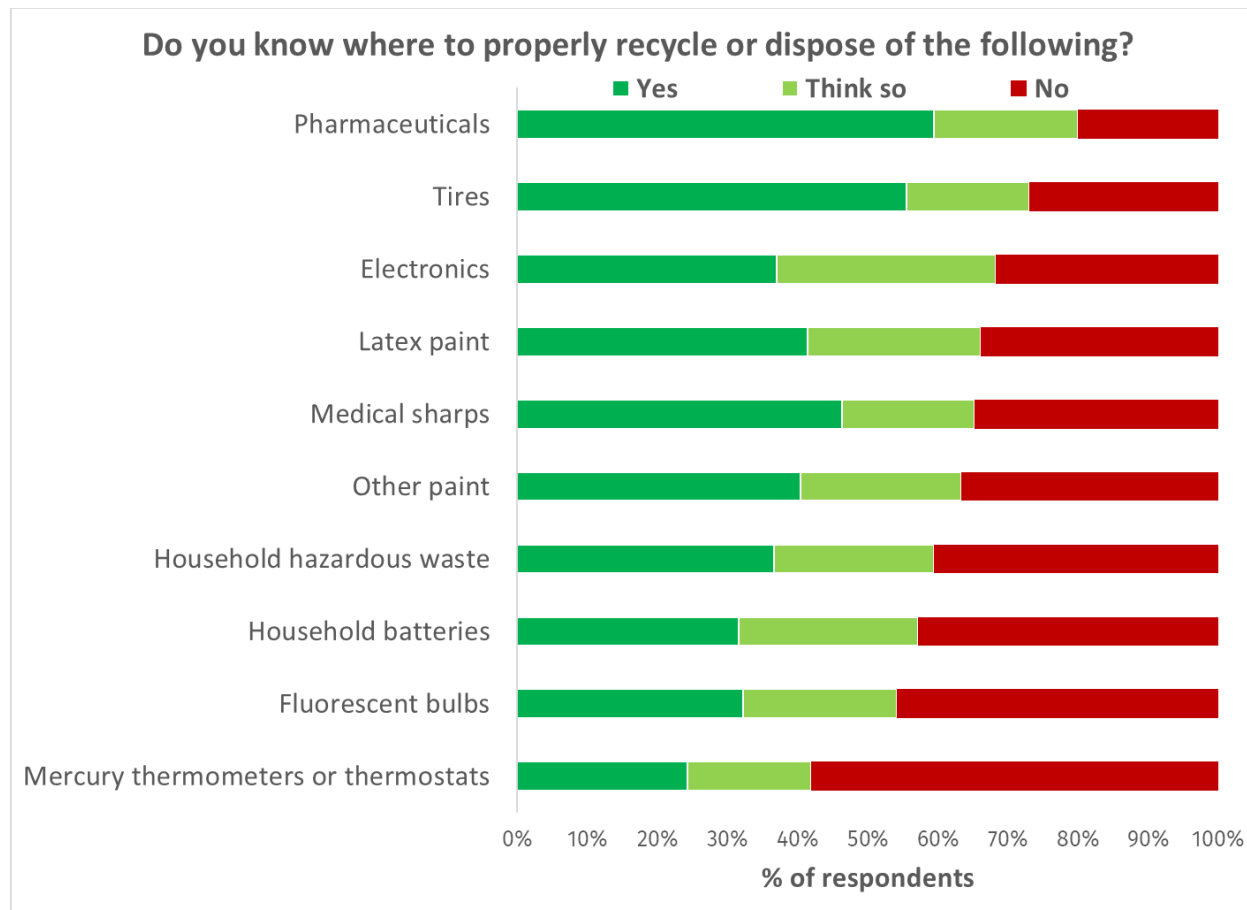
Material	Put in trash	Took to drop-off site	Put down drain	Stored	% of respondents who disposed of material
Pharmaceuticals or medicines	20%	69%	6%	15%	60%
Latex paint	28%	42%	2%	29%	45%
Other paint	19%	49%	1%	32%	39%
Household hazardous waste	21%	45%	3%	31%	47%



**Q11. Do you know where to properly recycle or dispose of the following items?**

Item	% of respondents		
	Yes	Think so but not certain	No
Mercury thermometers or thermostats	24%	18%	58%
Fluorescent bulbs	32%	22%	46%
Household batteries	32%	26%	43%
Household hazardous waste	37%	23%	41%
Other paint	40%	23%	37%
Medical sharps	46%	19%	35%
Latex paint	42%	25%	34%
Electronics	37%	31%	32%
Tires	56%	18%	27%
Pharmaceuticals	59%	21%	20%

The chart below also includes the response to the parallel question about electronics later in the survey.



**Q12. In the last 12 months, did you purchase any consumer electronics, such as a TV, computer, tablet, cell phone or printer, for your home?**

Fifty-five percent of respondents said they had purchased consumer electronics in the last 12 months.

**Q12a: Do any of the following methods describe how you purchased the consumer electronic in the last 12 months?**

This was a “check all that apply” question, so respondents could select more than one method.

Purchasing method	% of respondents who purchased new electronics
Online for in-store pickup	27%
Online for delivery	46%
In person at a store	70%
From another person	7%
Somewhere else	2%

**Q13. In 2009, Wisconsin passed a state electronics recycling law. The law bans many electronics from being put in the trash. The law also created a manufacturer-funded program called E-Cycle Wisconsin, to make it easier and more affordable to recycle certain electronics. Before reading the above statement, had you heard about...**

	% of respondents	
	Yes	No
...Wisconsin's landfill and incinerator ban on electronics?	48%	52%
...E-Cycle Wisconsin, the statewide electronics recycling program?	31%	69%

**Q14. Do you know where you can recycle electronics?**

Response	% of respondents
Yes, I am certain	37%
I think so but am not certain	31%
No	32%

### Q15. What is the farthest you would be willing to travel, one way, to recycle your electronics?

Statistic	Number of miles
Mean	15.69
Median	10
Mode	10
Minimum	0
Maximum	210

DNR Region	Median number of miles	Mean number of miles
Northeast	10	15
Northern	20	20
South Central	15	18
Southeast	10	13
West Central	15	18

### Q16. Number of electronics in home

*Question prompt: Please think about all the cell phones, computers, and TVs in your home that are working and not working, in use and not in use. This includes those in your basement, attic or garage. In the boxes below, please indicate the number of these electronics in your home. Enter the number that are currently in use in the first column and the number that are currently never used, including broken items, in the second column. If you do not have an item in your home, please enter 0. Do not include electronics owned by an employer.*

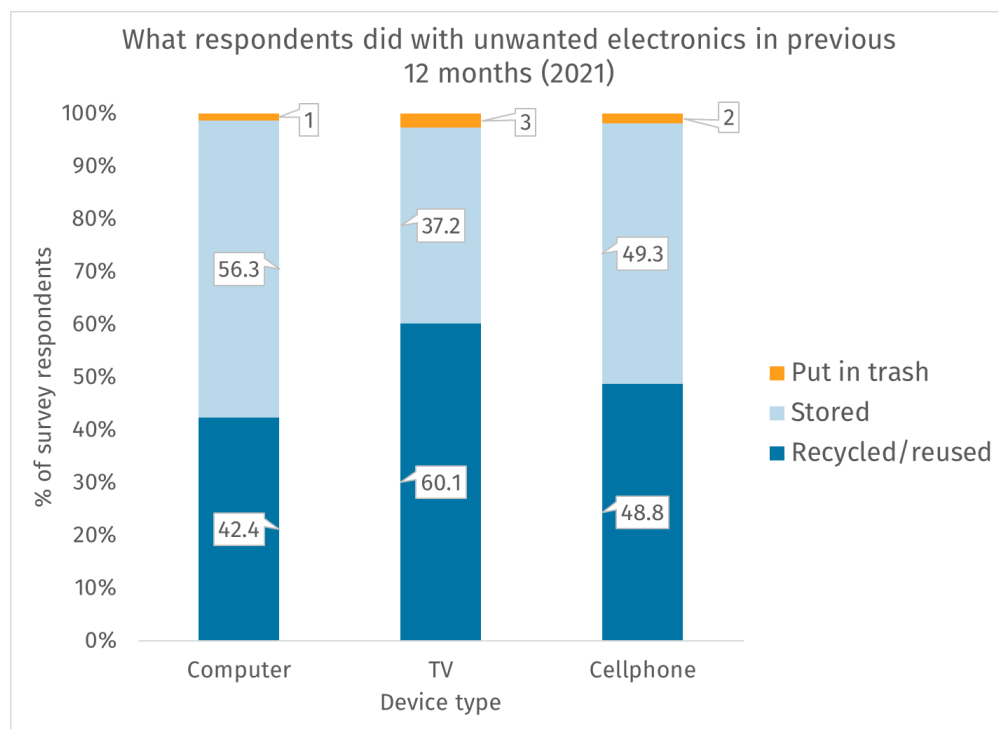
Statistic	# cellphones in use	# cellphones not in use	# computers in use	# computers not in use	# tube TVs in use	# tube TVs not in use	# flat panel TVs in use	# flat panel TVs not in use
Mean	2.11	1.65	2.47	.89	.14	.25	2.42	.29
Median	2.00	1.00	2.00	.00	.00	.00	2.00	.00
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum	9	20	11	22	5	14	9	6

Thirty-seven percent of respondents had at least one unused device in their home. The average number was 3.5 unused TVs, computers and/or cellphones.

**Q17. In the last 12 months, what did you do with each of the following electronic items that you no longer wanted? If you did not have or did not stop using particular type of electronics, please check NA for Not Applicable.**

What respondents did	% of respondents who stopped using device		
	Computer	TV	Cellphone
Stored	56%	37%	49%
Recycled	21%	31%	11%
Exchanged/ Returned to retailer	5%	3%	20%
Gave away to family/ friends	10%	16%	9%
Donated to charity	3%	5%	5%
Sold	3%	5%	4%
Put in trash	1%	3%	2%

The chart below combines the recycling and reuse options into one category.



**Q18. In the last 12 months, was there ever a time when you wanted to recycle electronics but were unable to do so?**

Twenty-nine percent of respondents said they had been unable to recycle electronics in the past 12 months.

**Q18a. Which of the following best describes why you were unable to recycle the electronics?**

Reason unable to recycle electronics	% of respondents unable to e-cycle
Don't know where/how	38%
Too expensive	20%
No convenient place	18%
Concerned about data security	14%
Unable to transport	4%
Other	3%
Easier to trash	2%
No time	1%

**Q19. Some collection sites charge a fee to recycle electronics. What is the most you would be willing to pay to recycle electronic items such as old TVs, monitors, and computers?**

Amount willing to pay per item	% of respondents
More than \$25	2%
\$21 to \$25	5%
\$16 to \$10	8%
\$11 to 15	8%
\$6 to \$10	21%
Up to \$5	52%
Nothing	25%

## Q20. Would you be willing to pay more than you indicated in question 19 above to recycle electronics if...

Incentive/service	% of respondents
...you received a gift card or coupon equal to some or all of the recycling cost?	78%
...you had a guarantee of responsible recycling and safe data destruction?	62%
...a recycler would pick up electronics from your home?	72%

## Q21. In the last 12 months, have you heard about where to recycle electronics from each of the following sources?

Overall, about 69 percent of respondents had heard about where to recycle electronics in the past 12 months. This was a “check all that apply” question, so respondents could select more than onesource.

Where heard about electronics recycling	% of respondents who heard about electronics recycling
Community	49%
Word of mouth	39%
Social media	24%
Electronics retailer	23%
News story	22%
Cannot recall	18%
Waste hauler	15%
Radio ad or announcement	12%
Online ad or announcement	10%
DNR website	9%
Other	7%

**Q22. Information on how and what to recycle should be provided by your municipality and recycling hauler. From the list below, please check your top TWO preferences for the best way for your community or hauler to provide you with information about recycling.**

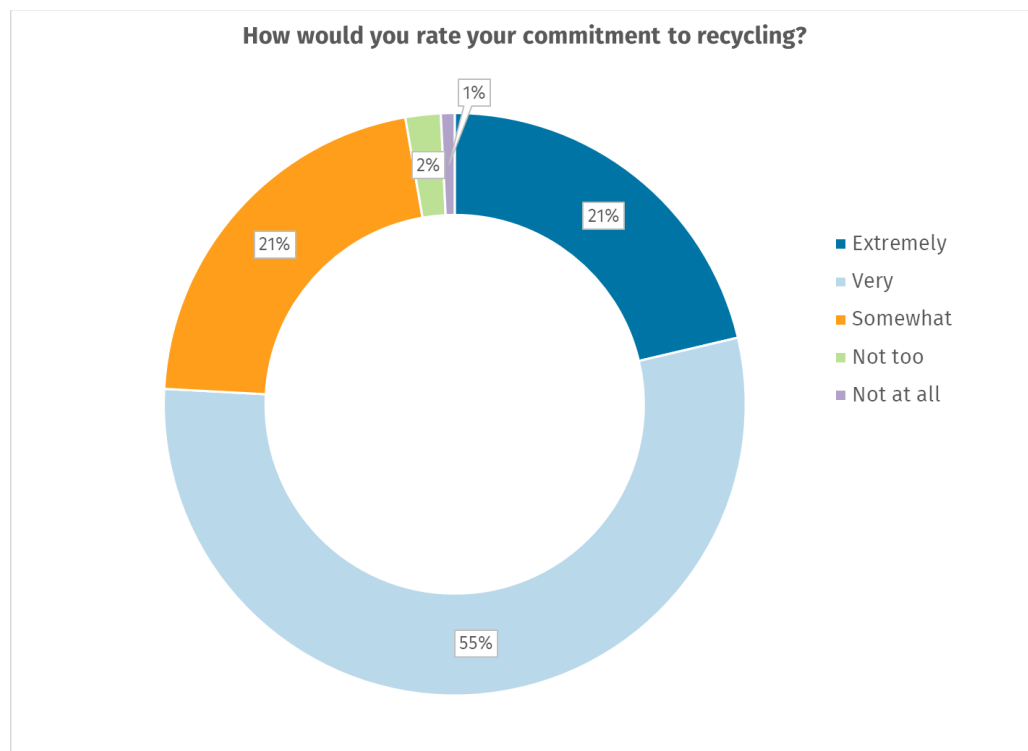
About 7% of respondents indicated they did not need information about recycling. Among respondents that provided a clear “other” method, 14 listed email and/or text message; six said they get information on something posted at their recycling center/drop-off point; and six said they prefer to get information via a flier or sticker on their recycling bin/cart.

Method	% of respondents
Print newsletter/other mailing	69%
Utility bill insert	46%
Website/internet	27%
Social media	16%
Newspaper	13%
Television	10%
Radio	5%
At community events	4%
Other	4%

**Q23. How would you rate your commitment to recycling?**

Level of commitment	% of respondents
Extremely committed	21%
Very committed	54%
Somewhat committed	21%
Not too committed	2%
Not at all committed	1%
Not sure	1%





**Q24. Most of the time, if you are unsure if something is recyclable, do you put it in the trash or the recycle bin?**

Action	% of respondents
I put it in the trash	57%
I put it in the recycle bin	43%

**Q25. How important to you are each of the following reasons to recycle?**

The ratings were assigned numeric values, with “extremely important” = 5 and “not at all important” = 1. The mean ratings give an idea of the relative importance to respondents of each reason to recycle.

Reason	Mean rating
Recycling reuses valuable resources	4.35
Recycling is the right thing to do	4.33
Recycling reduces pollution	4.31
Recycling preserves landfill space	4.24
Recycling creates jobs	3.55
Recycling is the law	3.51

The table below shows the percentage of respondents that selected each level.

Reason	Level of importance					
	Extremely	Very	Somewhat	Not too	Not at all	Not sure
Recycling reuses valuable resources	53%	35%	8%	1%	1%	2%
Recycling is the right thing to do	53%	34%	9%	2%	1%	1%
Recycling reduces pollution	51%	37%	10%	1%	0.6%	2%
Recycling preserves landfill space	48%	36%	12%	1%	1%	1%
Recycling is the law	27%	31%	23%	10%	6%	4%
Recycling creates jobs	21%	36%	31%	7%	3%	4%

## Q26. Do you own or rent the home you currently live in?

	% of respondents
Own, includes having a mortgage	79%
Rent	18%
Some other arrangement	3%

**Q27. In which Wisconsin county is your primary residence located?**

County	% of respondents	County	% of respondents
Adams	.3	Manitowoc	1.1
Ashford	.1	Marathon	2.2
Ashland	.3	Marinette	.3
Barron	.7	Milwaukee	12.5
Bayfield	.2	Monroe	1.1
Brown	5.1	Oconto	1.3
Burnett	.2	Oneida	.9
Calumet	1.1	Outagamie	3.1
Chippewa	.8	Ozaukee	1.7
Clark	.6	Pepin	.1
Columbia	1.1	Pierce	.6
Crawford	.4	Polk	.8
Dane	10.5	Portage	.8
Dodge	2.0	Price	.4
Door	.6	Racine	2.9
Douglas	.8	Rock	2.0
Dunn	.9	Rusk	.1
Eau Claire	1.7	Sauk	.7
Florence	.1	Sawyer	.3
Fond du Lac	1.4	Shawano	.7
Forest	.1	Sheboygan	2.0
Grant	.9	St. Croix	1.3
Green	.2	Taylor	.5
Green Lake	.2	Trempealeau	.6
Iowa	.6	Vernon	.7

Iron	.2	Vilas	.5
Jackson	.2	Walworth	1.9
Jefferson	1.5	Washburn	.3
Juneau	.3	Washington	2.6
Kenosha	1.7	Waukesha	8.5
Kewaunee	.2	Waupaca	.8
La Crosse	2.3	Waushara	.4
Lafayette	.4	Winnebago	3.3
Langlade	.3	Wood	1.6
Lincoln	1.1		

**Q28. How would you describe the place where you live?**

Area description	% of respondents
Rural	36%
Urban	25%
Suburban	39%

**Q29. In the last 12 months, how many people usually lived in your household, including yourself?**

Statistic	Number of people in household
Mean	2.52
Median	2.00

### Q30. What is your current age?

Statistic	Age
Mean	56.85
Median	59
Minimum	18
Maximum	96

Age group	% of respondents
18 to 29	6%
30 to 49	28%
50 to 64	35%
65+	31%

### Q31. What is your gender?

Gender identity	% of respondents
Female	51%
Male	48%
Other	1%