

Household Recycling Survey 2021 Results



Council on Recycling
September 1, 2022

Survey Design

- Conducted approx. every 5 years since 2006
- Questionnaire mailed to 2,000 randomly sampled residents. 3 mailings total with an initial \$2 incentive
- 48% response, collected April – July 2021
- Skewed towards homeowners and older residents

Topics Covered



Traditional
recycling



Problem
materials



Food waste



Open
burning



Electronics
recycling

Recycling Accessibility, Behavior, & Motivations

Recycling Commitment and Services

- 97% at least “somewhat committed” to recycling
 - 75% “very” or “extremely committed”
-
- 80% of respondents have curbside pickup
 - Remainder either contract privately or take to drop-off site

Barriers to recycling and why it's important

- 65% said they always recycle and did not select any barriers
 - In 2016, 80% said they always recycle
 - Nearly all barriers to recycling have risen since the last survey
 - “Don’t have a convenient place” fell by almost half
-

- Environmental reasons were rated as more important reasons to recycle than creating jobs or following the law

Figure 1. Recycling Barriers 2021 vs. 2016

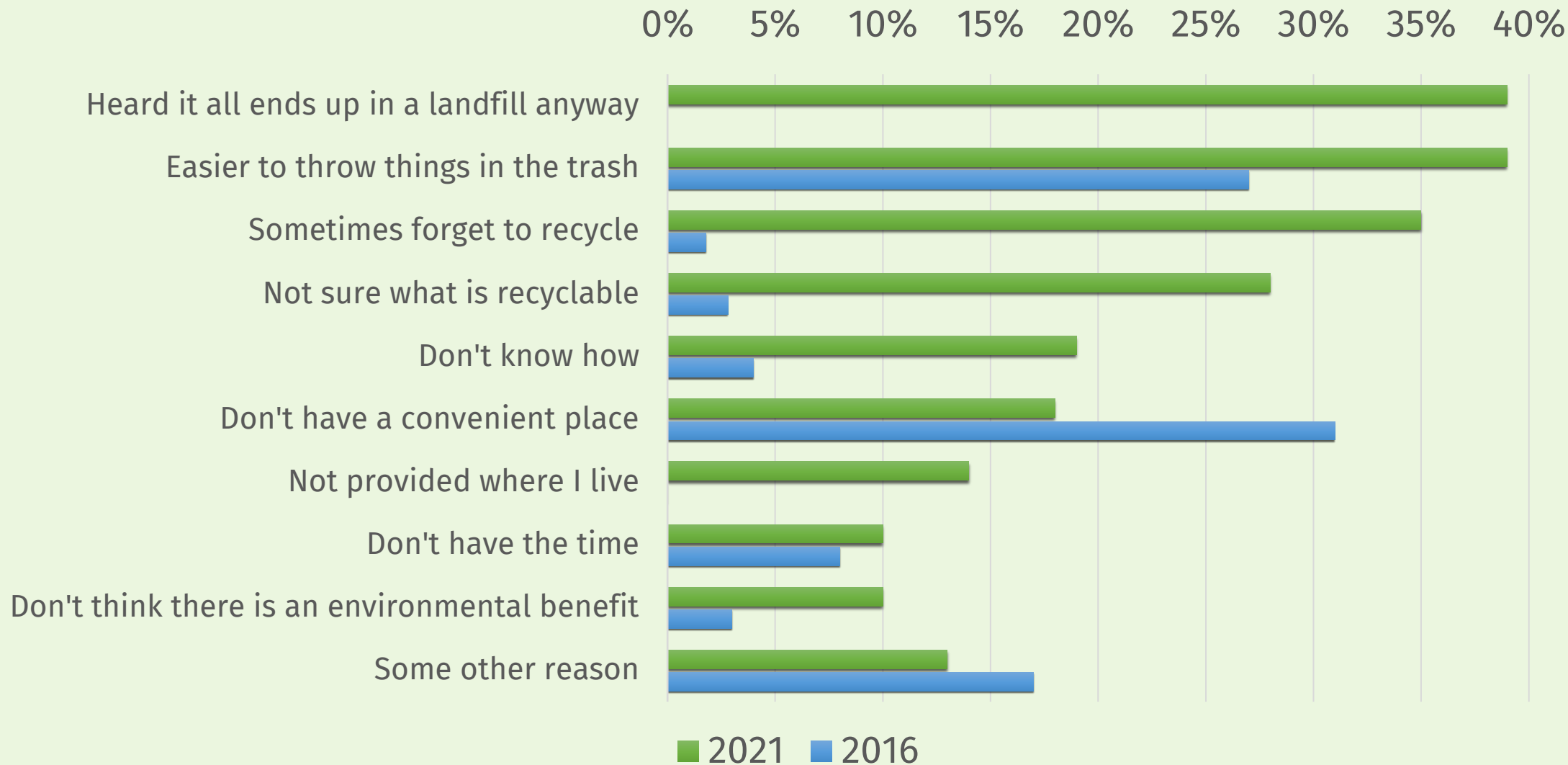
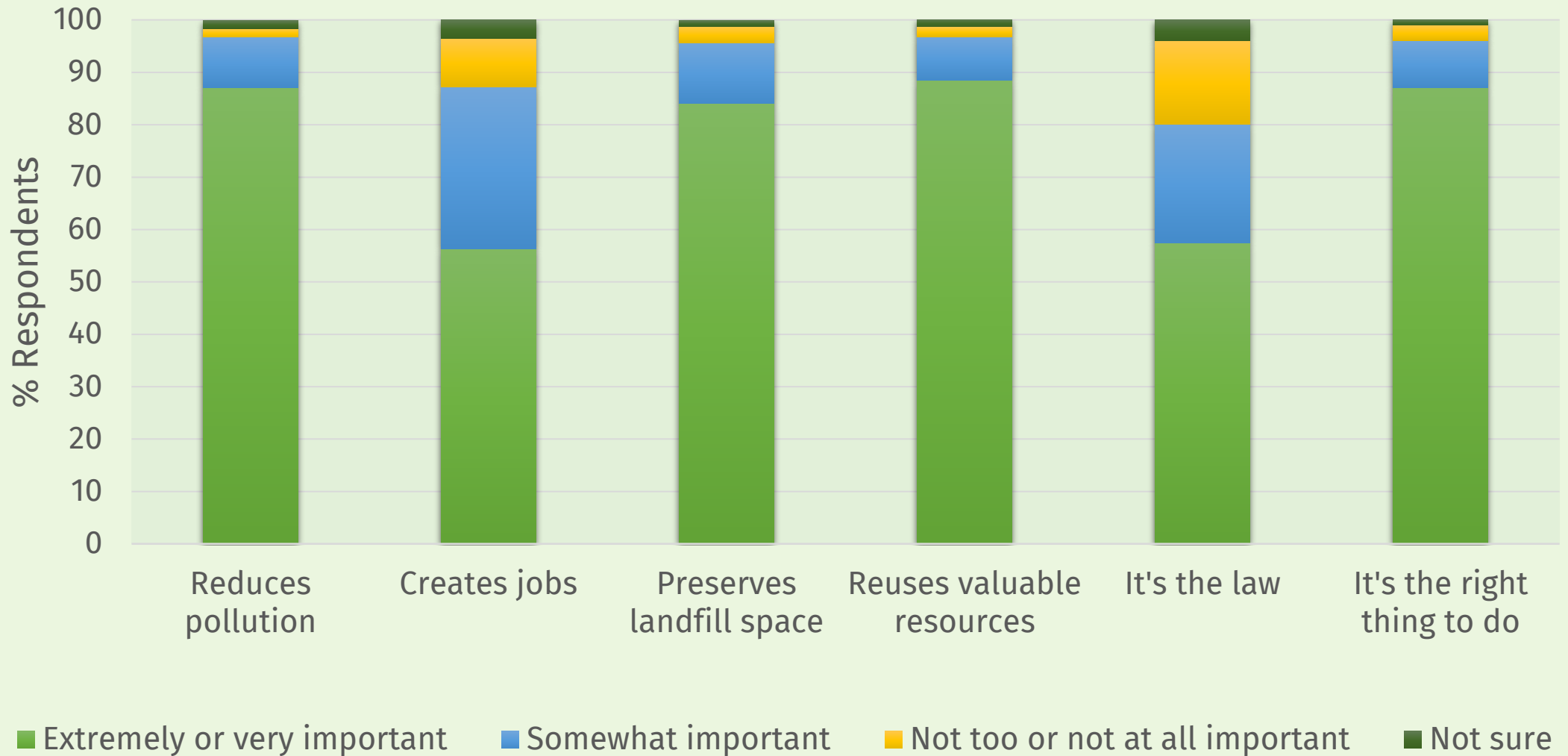
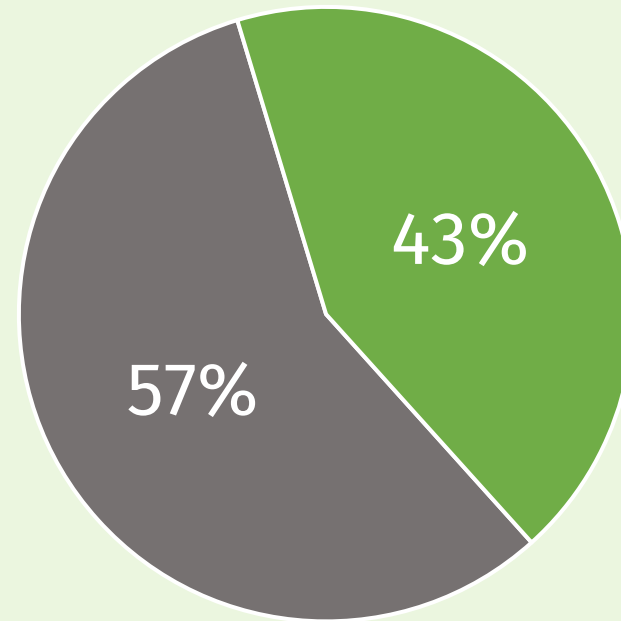


Figure 2. Importance of Reasons to Recycle



Avoidance of wish-cycling

Figure 3. Disposal of uncertain items



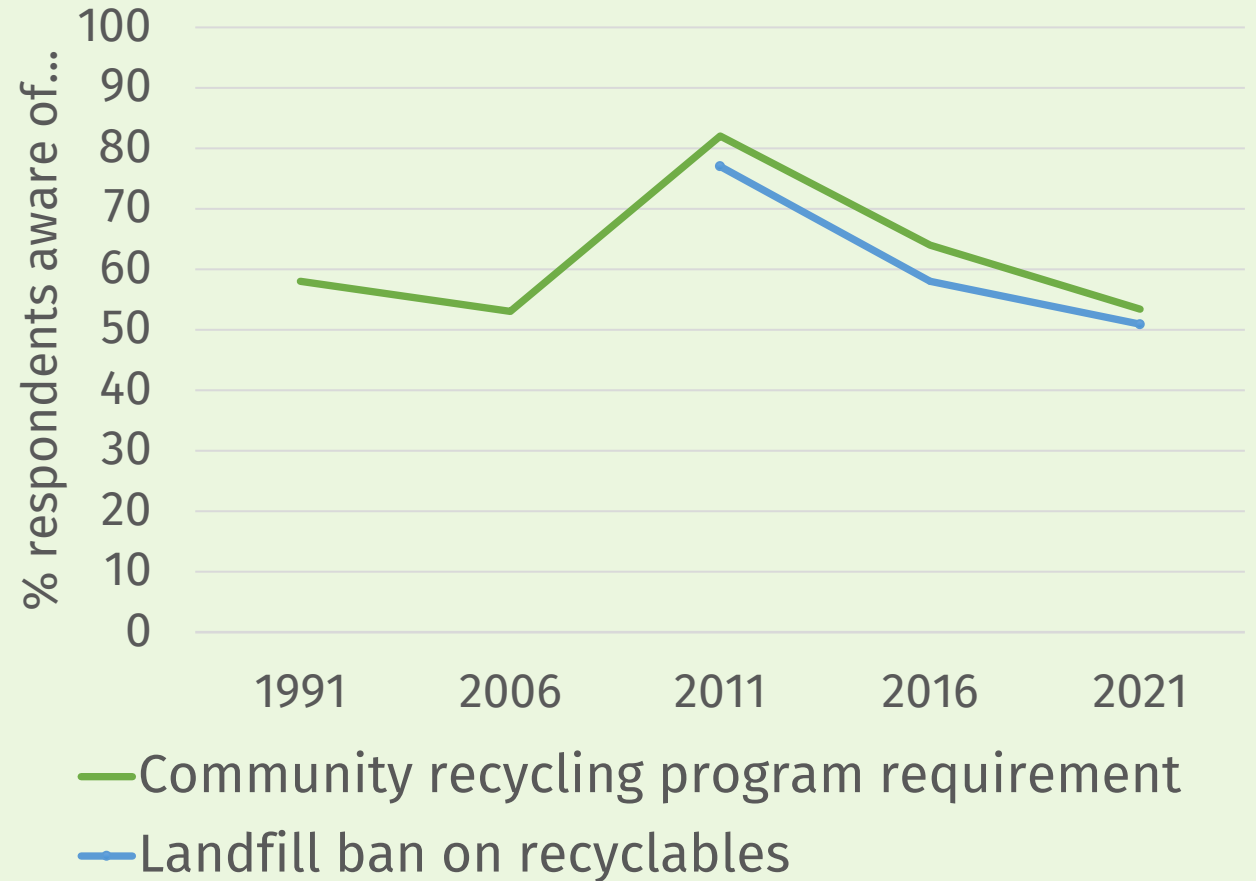
■ Trash ■ Recycling

Recycling Knowledge & Communication

Knowledge of Recycling Law

- 30% drop over past decade
- Respondents were asked for the first time if they were aware multi-family and non-residential properties must provide separate containers for trash and recycling. 55% reported that they were aware of the law

Figure 4. Knowledge of Laws



Actual vs. Preferred Recycling Info Sources

- 71% received recycling info in the past year, consistent with previous surveys
 - Only 32% of renters indicated they received info from their landlord
-
- Receiving information via mail most popular source since 2011
 - Respondents under 50 preferred the internet and social media more than those older than 50

Figure 5. Recycling Information Sources

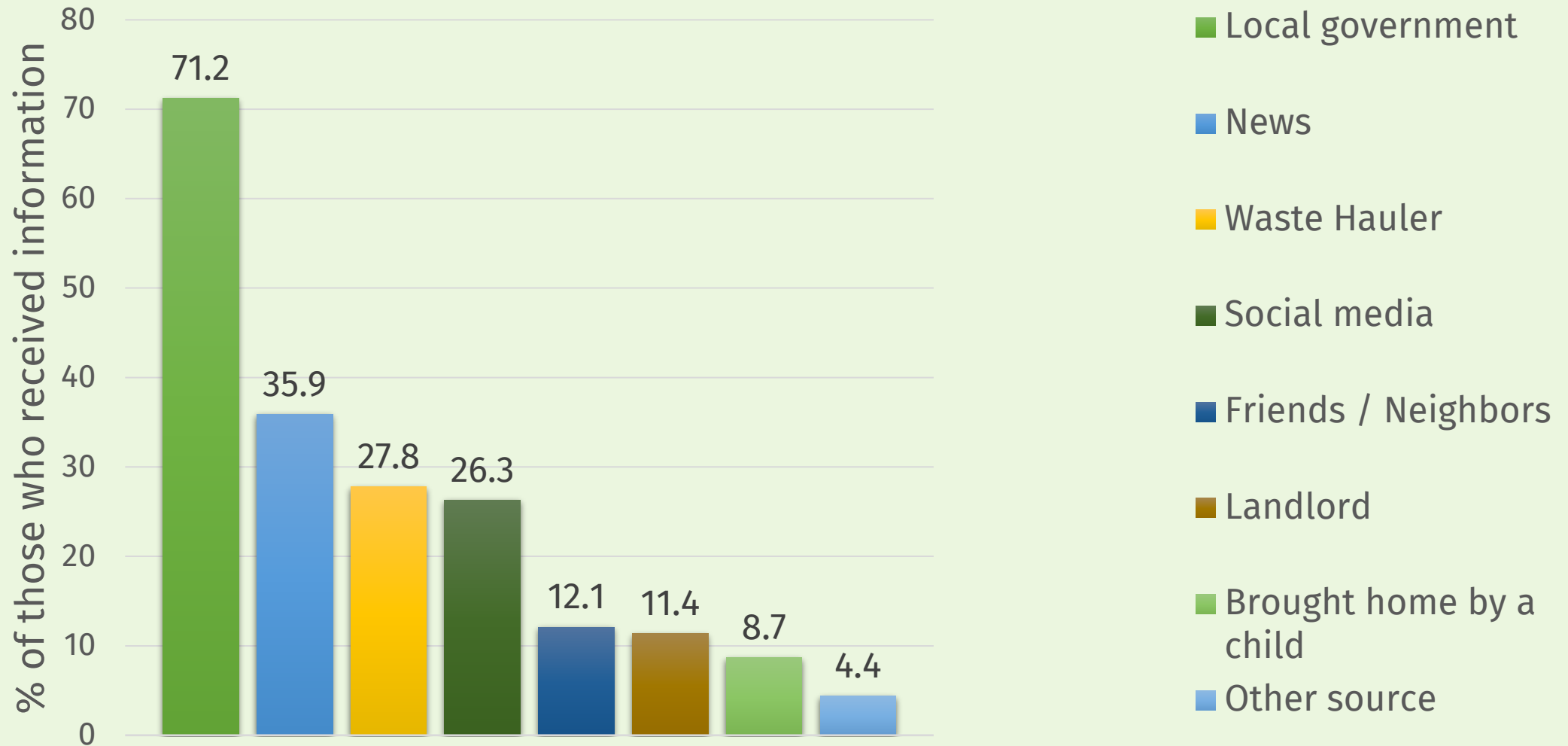
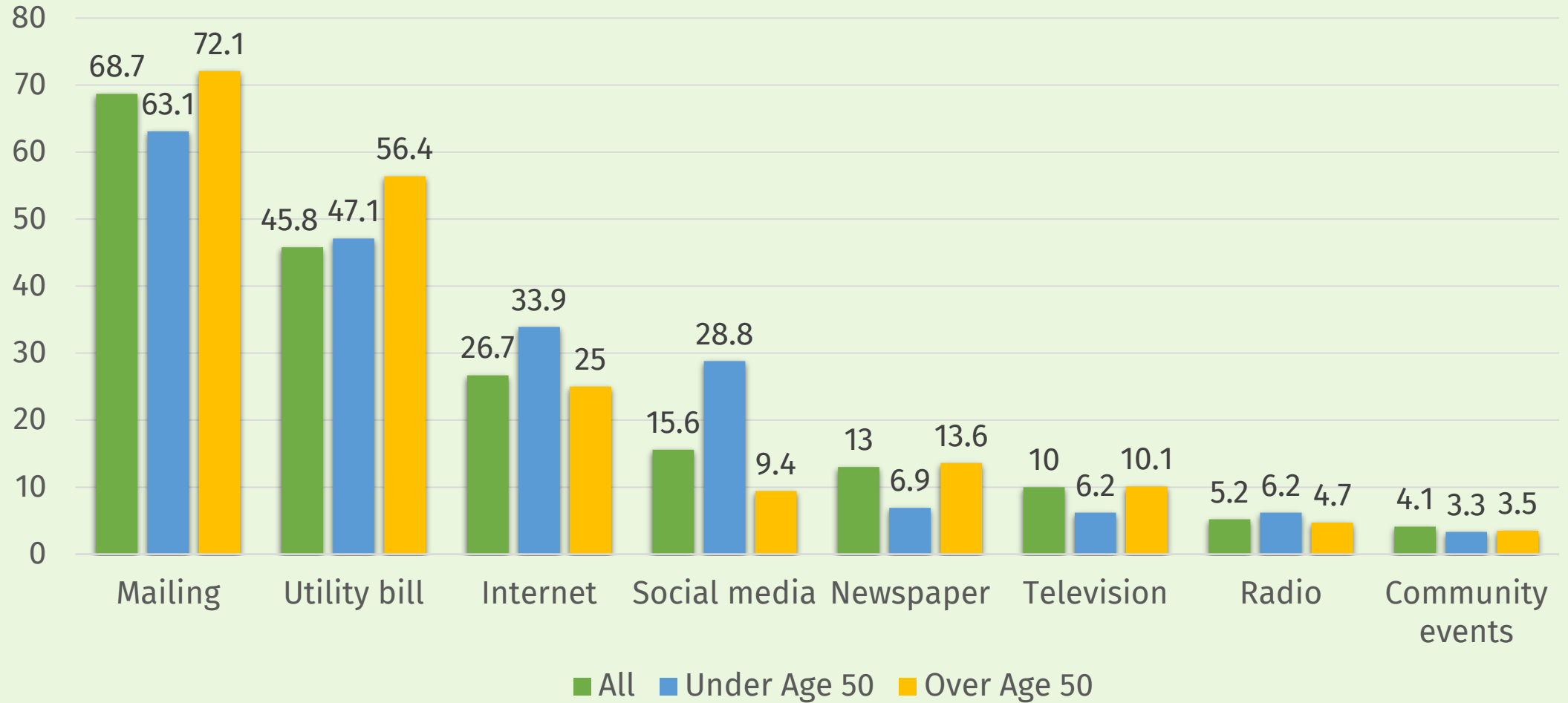


Figure 6. Preferred Recycling Information Source

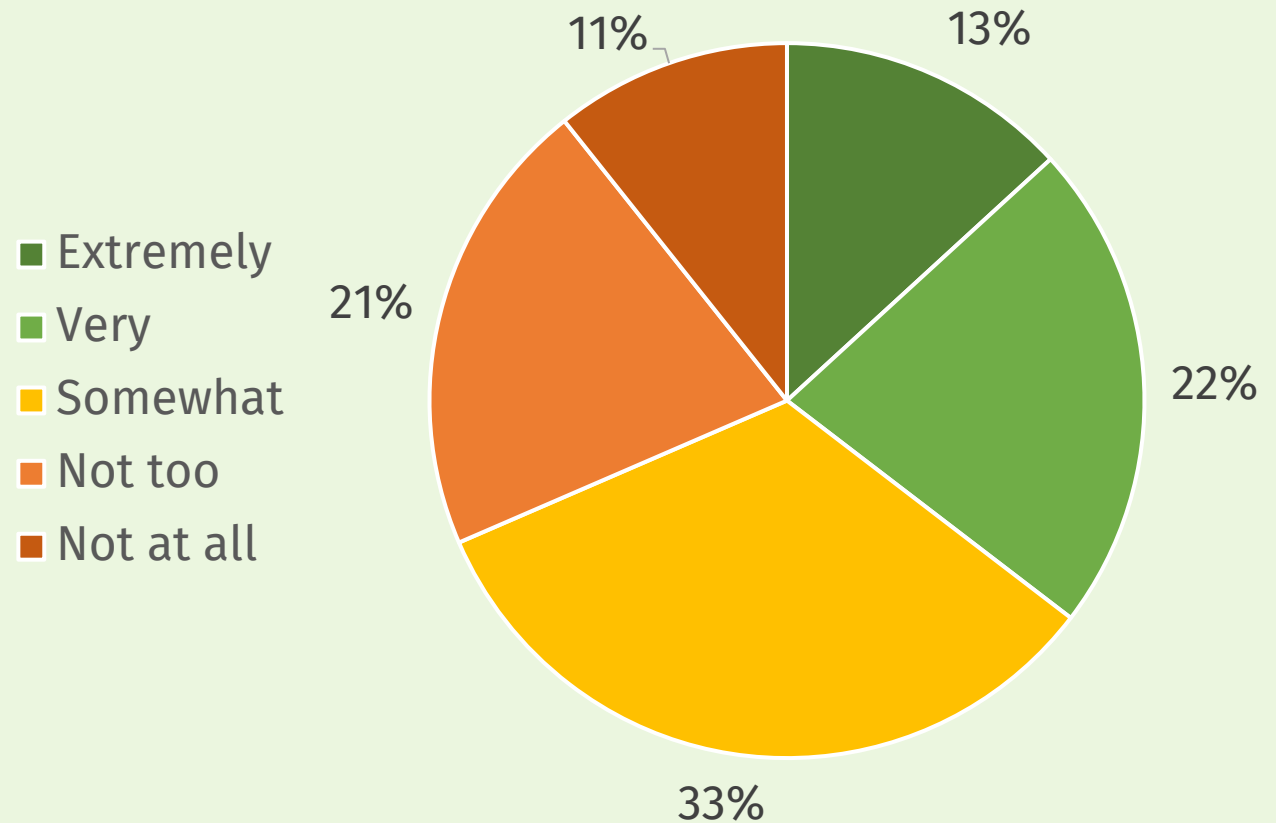


Backyard Burning, Food Waste, & Household Item Disposal

Backyard Burning

- 1/3 respondents legally burn leaves, grass, and brush
- No shift in attitudes on burning trash since 2011
- 7.3% burned recyclables in the past year
- 3.3% burned trash in the past year

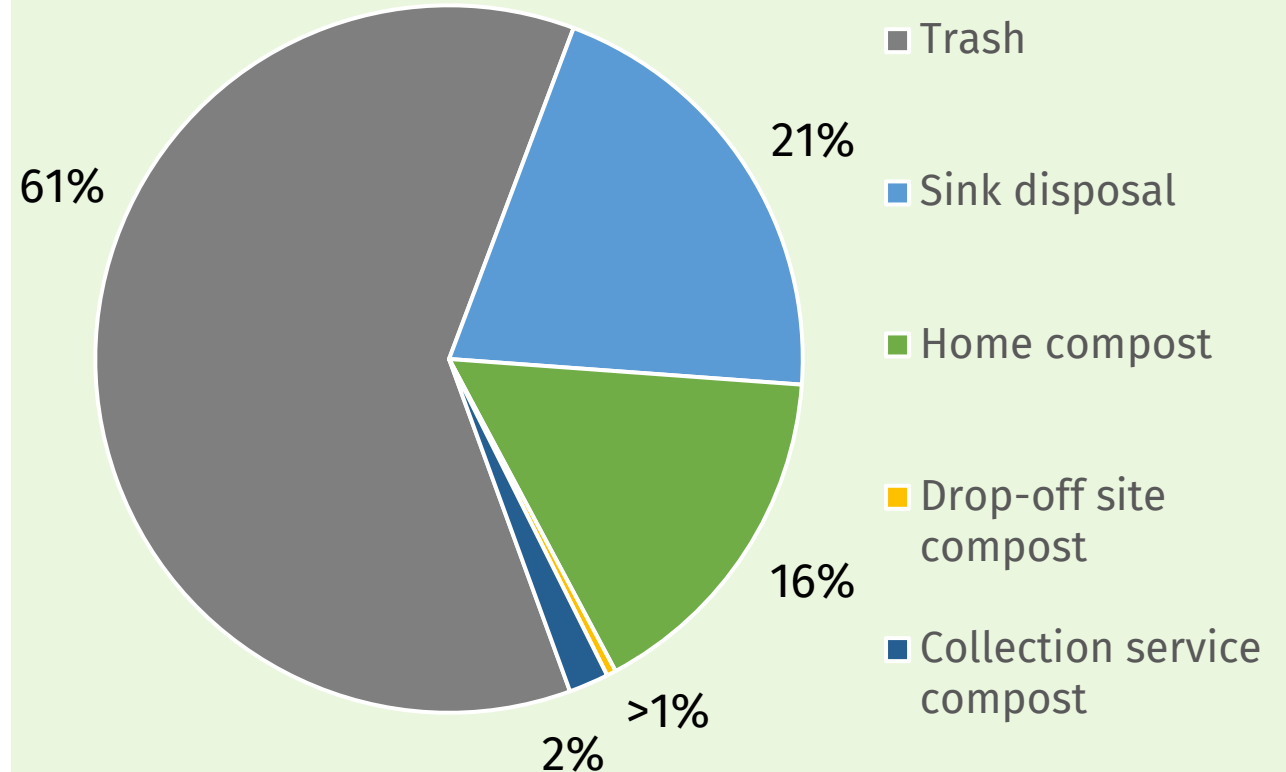
Figure 7. Concern Regarding Health Effects of Burning Trash



Food Waste Disposal

- First time respondents were asked about food waste
- Nearly 20% compost in some format
- 30% in both northern and rural areas compost

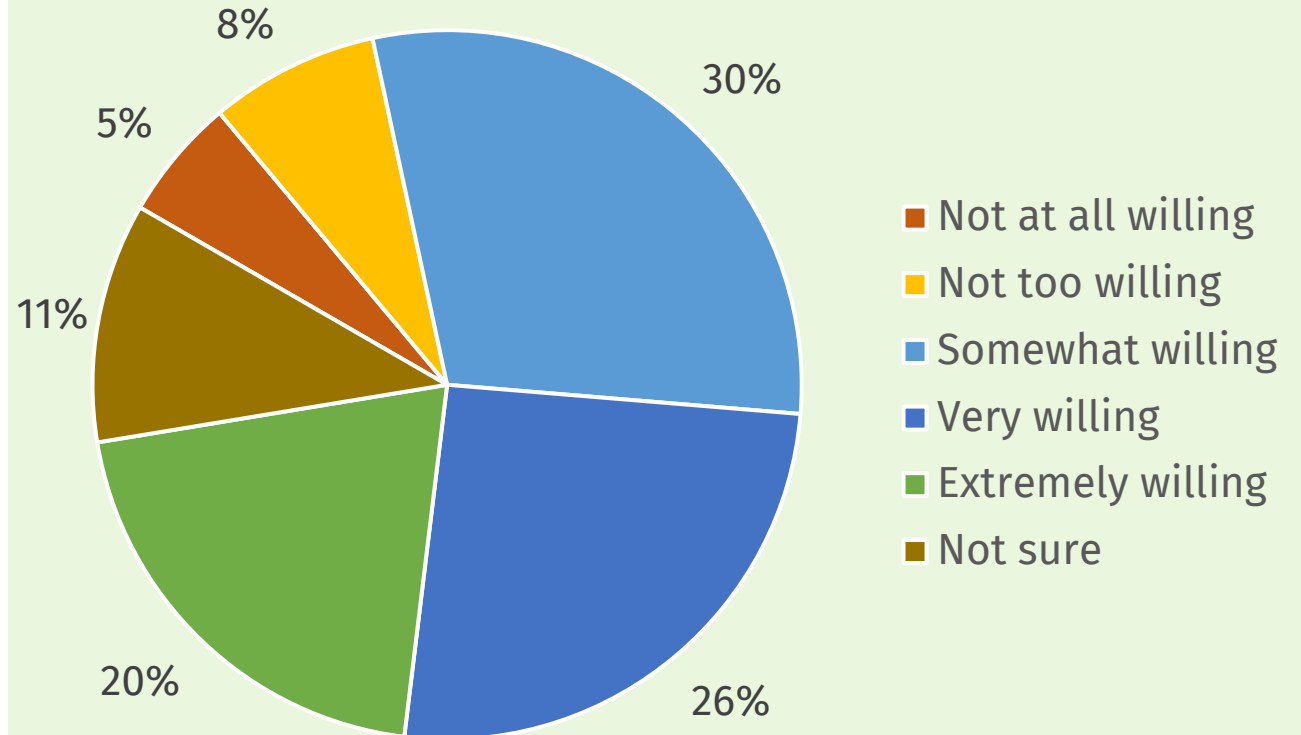
Figure 8. Method of Food Waste Disposal



Food Waste Separation

- Over 92% of respondents aged 19-29 were at least somewhat willing to separate food waste, compared to the overall average of 76%

Figure 9. Willingness to Separate Food Waste

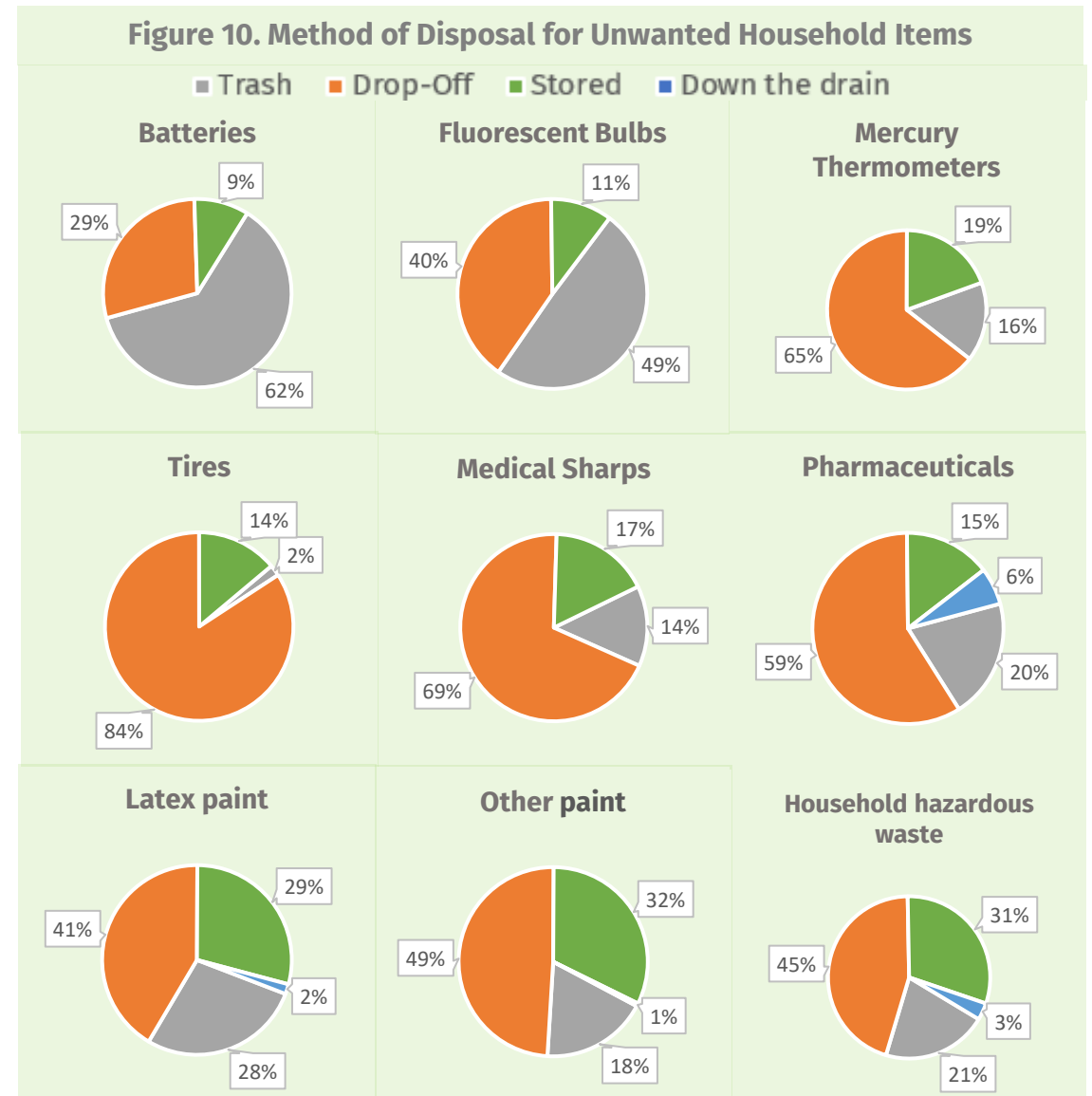


Household Item Disposal

| Material Type | % of respondents who disposed of material in the last 12 months |
|---------------------------|---|
| Household batteries | 85% |
| Pharmaceuticals | 60% |
| Fluorescent bulbs | 57% |
| Household hazardous waste | 47% |
| Latex paint | 45% |
| Other paint | 39% |
| Tires | 34% |
| Medical sharps | 25% |
| Mercury thermometers | 13% |

- Disposal consistent with 2016 survey
- Batteries and bulbs are most likely to be thrown in the trash. They are also the first and third most common material handled
- Drop-off of pharmaceuticals rose 20% since 2011

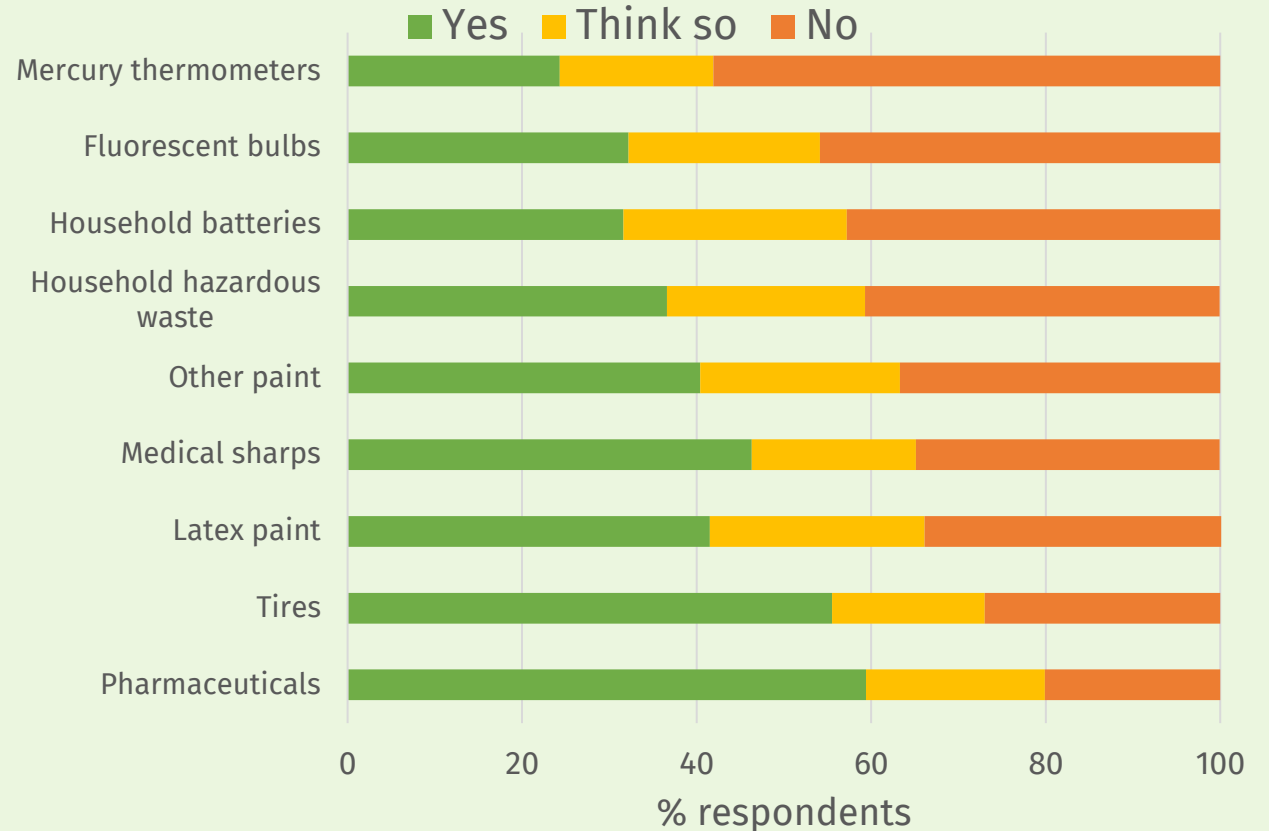
| Table 1. | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Material Type | % of respondents who disposed of material in the last 12 months |
| Household batteries | 85% |
| Pharmaceuticals | 60% |
| Fluorescent bulbs | 57% |
| Household hazardous waste | 47% |
| Latex paint | 45% |
| Other paint | 39% |
| Tires | 34% |
| Medical sharps | 25% |
| Mercury thermometers | 13% |



Disposal Knowledge

- Over 50% confident disposing pharmaceuticals and tires
- Only 32% confident disposing of batteries
- Younger respondents less confident on battery disposal
- Respondents who heard about electronics recycling in the past year were more likely to know how to manage batteries

Figure 11. Do you know where to properly dispose of...?



Conclusions

Key Takeaways

Areas of concern

- 40% heard recyclables end up in the landfill
- Decline of recycling law knowledge
- Only 1/3 renters receive recycling info from landlord
- Limited confidence disposing of household items

Areas of progress

- Convenience of recycling is less of a barrier
- Drop-off disposal of pharmaceuticals up 20% in past decade
- Over 75% at least somewhat willing to separate food waste

Key Takeaways

- Recycling commitment remains high
- Environmental responsibilities cited as most important reasons to recycle
- Respondents continue to prefer recycling info via mail

CONNECT WITH US

Questions?

Jennifer Semrau

Jennifer.Semrau@wisconsin.gov

608-381-0960



/WIDNR



@WIDNR



@WI_DNR



/WIDNRTV



"WILD WISCONSIN:
OFF THE RECORD"