

# SINGLE-USE ITEMS:

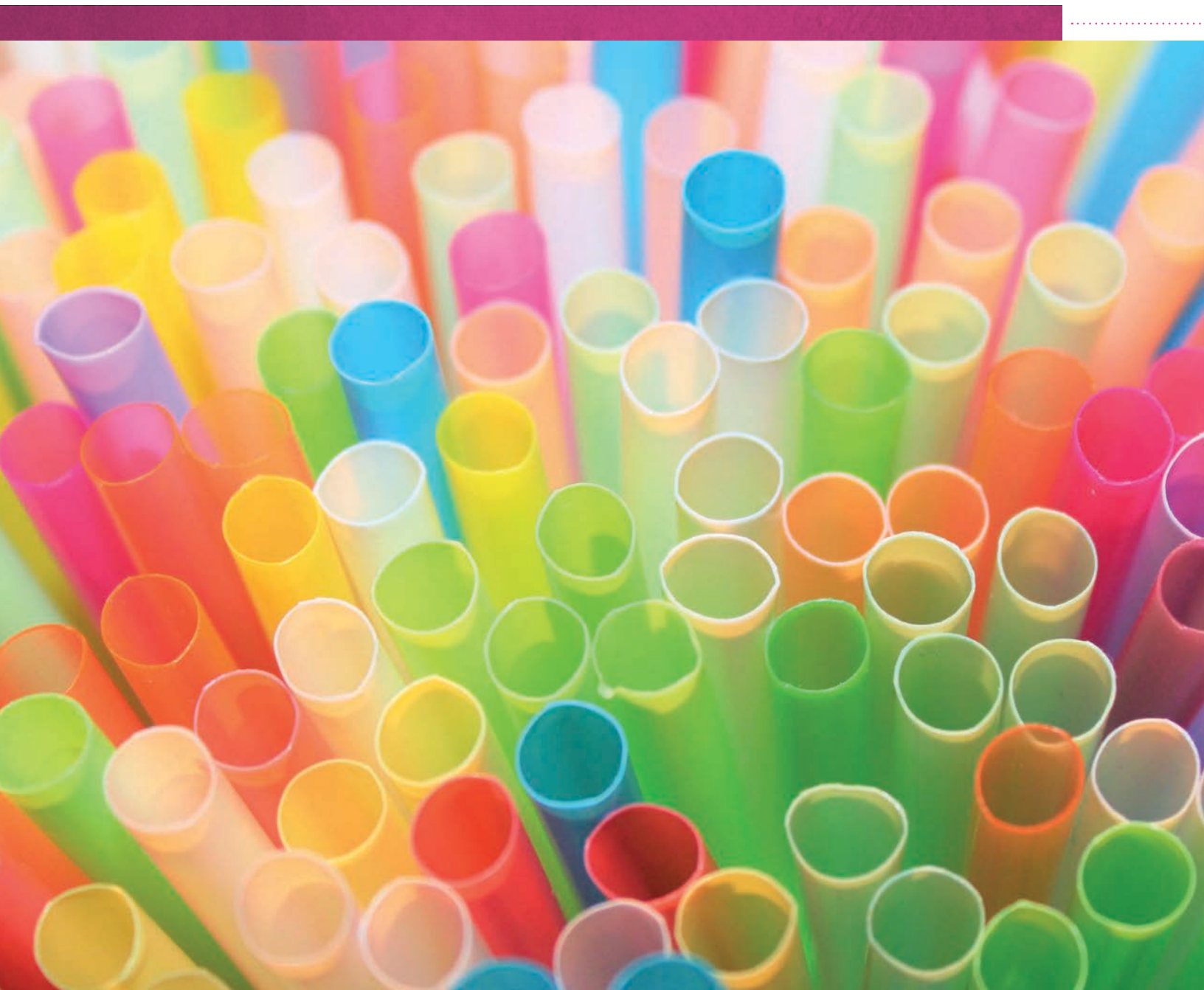


## WHAT YOU SAID

[york.ca/reducewaste](http://york.ca/reducewaste)

  
York Region

This report summarizes the results and findings from all three engagements: the survey, quiz and accessibility consultation.



# About the Engagement Process

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Reducing single-use items is one aspect of The Regional Municipality of York's SM4RT Living Waste Management Master Plan. A single-use item is any item designed to be used once and then discarded. Common single-use items include takeout beverage cups, takeout containers, and plastic bags, straws and cutlery.

In July 2021, York Region engaged the public to inform the development of a strategy to reduce single-use items.

The engagement focused on takeout items and items that people encounter in the community (like plastic bags) as well as the impact COVID-19 may have had on the use of single-use items.

The engagement consisted of three elements:

1. An online Single-Use Items Survey conducted throughout the month of July 2021
2. An online 'Waste Quiz' conducted in August 2021
3. A consultation with the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee in September 2021

The results of the engagement process will help the Region develop an education strategy to encourage residents to reduce their use of single-use items, an 'Ask First' program to encourage businesses to ask before providing single-use items to customers and a communications strategy to reduce blue box contamination.



# Survey Summary

The Single-Use Items Survey was available from July 4 to 30, 2021 on [york.ca/reducewaste](http://york.ca/reducewaste) and promoted through social media platforms, e-newsletters, road signs, digital and print advertising and on the Region's internal website. The survey was completed by 1,980 respondents.\*

Overall, survey results show that respondents are concerned about the impacts of single-use items and support actions to reduce their use and impacts on the environment.

The following are highlights from the survey. Full results can be found in the *Detailed Results* section of this report.

**Our survey was open from July 4 to July 30, 2021 and was completed by 1,980 respondents.**

## How you use single-use items

### Top items used daily or weekly:

1. Plastic bags
2. Disposable masks
3. Clear, white or any colour plastic containers (besides black)
4. Hot beverage takeout cups

### Top items used since COVID-19:

1. Disposable masks and gloves
2. Black plastic containers
3. Plastic bags

### Top reasons for buying or receiving single-use items:

1. Shops or restaurants providing them without asking
2. Not being provided reusable options by the shops or restaurants
3. Making unexpected purchases and not having a reusable item on hand

*\*Most survey questions were optional so response rates varied slightly depending on the question. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not equal 100%. Some questions permitted respondents to select more than one answer, therefore the percentages will exceed 100%.*

## What you think about single-use items

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- Almost 99% of respondents are concerned about littered single-use items in York Region
- Top three concerns about littered single-use items are impacts on waterways, green space and wildlife

## How you use reusable items

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### The top reusable items used (daily or a few times a week):

1. Food storage containers (e.g. Tupperware)
2. Reusable shopping bags
3. Reusable water bottles

## What you think about reusable items since COVID-19

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- 52% are extremely or moderately concerned about the safety of reusable items brought from home since COVID-19
- 80% would feel more comfortable using them if businesses enacted certain measures like contactless handling or deposit return programs

"Overall, survey results show that **respondents are concerned** about the impacts of single-use items and support actions to reduce their use and impacts on the environment."

## What you know about York Region's waste system

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- 85% feel confident they know how to sort their household waste accurately
- 71% think the system is easy to understand
- Only 40% feel they understand what happens to their waste after it leaves the curb

## What you think about York Region's recycling system

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- 88% think that recycling is helpful and worthwhile
- 74% think blue box contamination is a problem in York Region
- 57% trust their recycling is being recycled effectively

## Actions you would support

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### Top items that respondents would like to see reduced:

1. Styrofoam cups and containers
2. All plastic containers including black plastic
3. Disposable cutlery

### Other actions supported by respondents

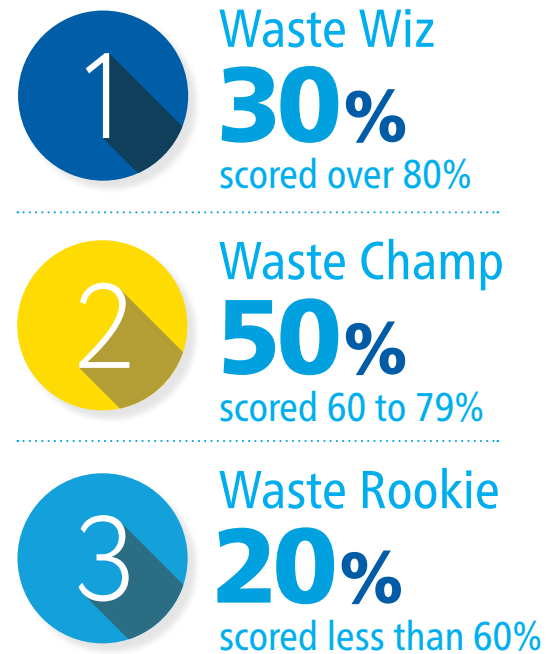
- 87% would like businesses to ask them first before giving them a single-use item
- 78% would choose stores that reduce single-use items
- 76% would like to use a service that helps identify businesses working to reduce their use of single-use items
-

# Waste Quiz Summary

A quiz to test York Region residents' knowledge about sorting their waste was launched on social media in August 2021. The objective of the quiz was twofold: to help the Region better understand what residents know and don't know about sorting their waste, and to offer residents a fun and interactive way to learn what goes where.

This quiz was completed by 703 people and was promoted on social media and via email to respondents of the Single-Use Items survey. After completing the quiz, respondents were shown the correct answers with explanations. The quiz also grouped respondents into one of three categories: Waste Wiz (over 80% score), Waste Champ (60-79% score), or Waste Rookie (< 60% score).

This quiz was completed by 703 people and was promoted on social media.





# Quiz Highlights

The average quiz score:

**71%**

Only

**13%**

correctly guessed  
York Region's landfill  
diversion rate of 93%

**99%**

correctly  
responded that  
boxboard goes in  
the blue box

**97%**

correctly responded  
that food scraps go  
in the green bin

**97%**

correctly responded  
that batteries  
should go to a  
waste depot or  
drop-off location

**76%**

correctly responded  
that disposable  
coffee cups and lids  
go in the garbage

**75%**

correctly responded  
that coffee pods go  
in the garbage

**50%**

correctly responded  
that cutlery marked  
'compostable' goes  
in the garbage



# Accessibility Consultation Summary

On September 22, 2021, York Region staff presented the Region's single-use voluntary reduction strategy to the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (YRAAC). YRAAC is a committee made up of community members (most of whom are living with disabilities), York Regional Councillors Don Hamilton and Tom Vegh (Chair) and York Region Chairman and CEO, Wayne Emmerson. The Committee advises York Regional Council and staff on how to make it easier for people with disabilities to use York Region programs and services.

The Committee was provided with background on the SM4RT Living Waste Management Master Plan and the Region's intention to work with businesses and residents to reduce single-use items in our community. The Committee was asked the following questions:

1. What barriers or gaps do we need to address within the 'Ask First' policy for businesses and voluntary reduction program for residents?
2. What more can we do or do differently to mitigate concerns and ensure inclusivity and accessibility?
3. What single-use items are most important for accessibility?
4. What additional information would you like to know?

The York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee advises Council and staff on how to make it easier for people with disabilities to use York Region programs.



# Committee Highlights

1

Banning plastic straws can create safety and lack of autonomy issues for persons with disabilities

2

Stigmatization is an issue when some items are available only for some people and not others

3

Plastic cups are essential for those with compromised immune systems or those who require a support person because they are the safer, more sanitary option

4

Home delivery of food and goods has increased, which is a benefit for most people, including those with disabilities; more packaging makes products more sanitary however can also create more waste

5

The Region should ensure people with disabilities are part of the conversation prior to making changes, and those changes need to be well-communicated (for example, if stores are eliminating plastic bags)

6

The Region should invest more in education on single-use items, especially targeting schools and students

"What more can we do or do differently to mitigate concerns and ensure inclusivity and accessibility?"

"What single-use items are most important for accessibility?"

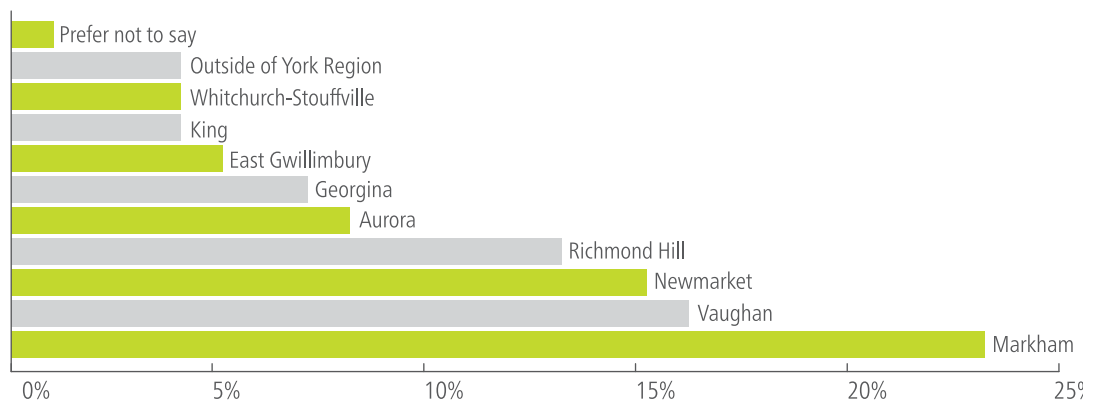
# Detailed Survey Results

*NOTE: Percentages in the next few pages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not equal 100%. Some questions permitted more than one answer, therefore percentages may exceed 100%.*

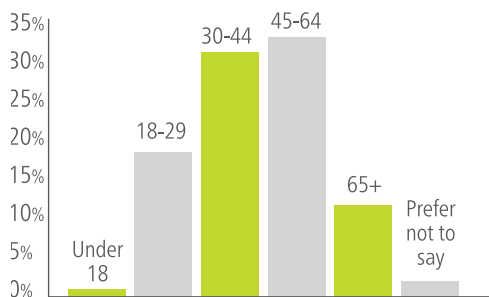
In July 2021, the Region conducted a Single-Use Items survey, and had 1,980 respondents. The survey was a first step in learning how and why single-use items are used in York Region.

The detailed results are summarized below and will be used to build a strategy to reduce the use of single-use items in York Region.

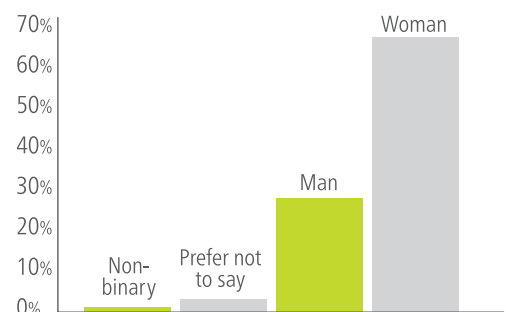
## What municipality do you live in?



## What is your age range?



## How do you identify?





The most common item used was **plastic bags**, with **41%** using them daily to a few times per week.

Approximately **one-quarter** reported using plastic containers and plastic bags **more often** since the onset of COVID-19.

# 1. How frequently do you buy or receive the following single-use items?

The most common item used was plastic bags, with 41% using them daily to a few times a week. The second most common item (and the top item used daily by respondents) was disposable masks, with 40% using them daily or weekly. (Note: this survey took place in July 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic.)



## 2. Do you buy or receive the following single-use items more, less or the same as you did prior to COVID-19?

Many single-use items are being used more often since the onset of COVID-19. Unsurprisingly, the top item was disposable masks, followed by disposable gloves. 25% also reported using takeout items more, like black plastic containers and plastic bags. This is likely due to many stores and restaurants not accepting reusables during COVID-19.

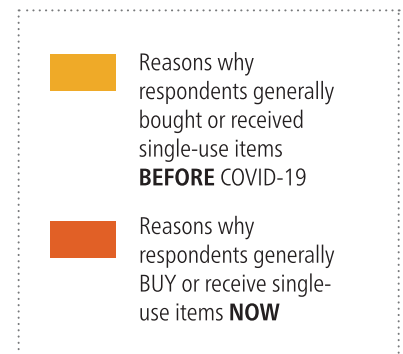
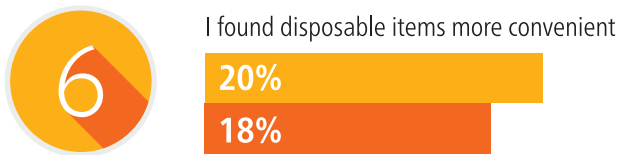
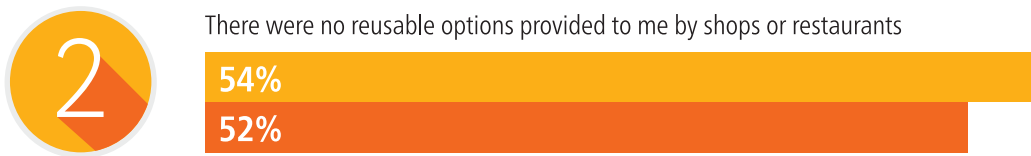


### 3. Please select the top three reasons why you generally bought or received single-use items **before** COVID-19.

Two-thirds of respondents said the main reason they use single-use items is that they are given the item without being asked first. Over half of the respondents also indicated the lack of reusable options provided, and making unexpected purchases as other primary reasons.

\*Of the 3% who selected 'Other', most of the responses were similar to, or the same as the options provided in the survey. Additional reasons outside of the ones provided included:

- Requiring single-use item (e.g. plastic bag) for holding garbage or other household materials
- Grocery stores only providing certain items in single-use packaging
- Requiring single-use items to host events or when picking up takeout food for others



#### 4. Please select the top three reasons why you generally buy or receive single-use items **now**.

The top three reasons respondents use single-use items during COVID-19 are the same as the top reasons before the pandemic. However, on this question, an increased number of respondents also noted they used single-use items during the pandemic because shops and restaurants did not permit them to use reusables.

\*Of the 3% who selected 'Other', most of the responses were similar to or the same as the options provided in the survey. Additional reasons outside of the ones provided included:

- Getting takeout more often
- Work or public health advice requiring use of disposable items like masks and gloves
- Other alternatives being inappropriate (for example, paper straws that disintegrate)
- Grocery stores only providing certain items in single-use packaging



**Two-thirds of respondents** said the main reason they use single-use items is that they are given the item **without being asked first**.

**Half of the respondents** obtained single-use items when they made unexpected purchases without their reusables with them.

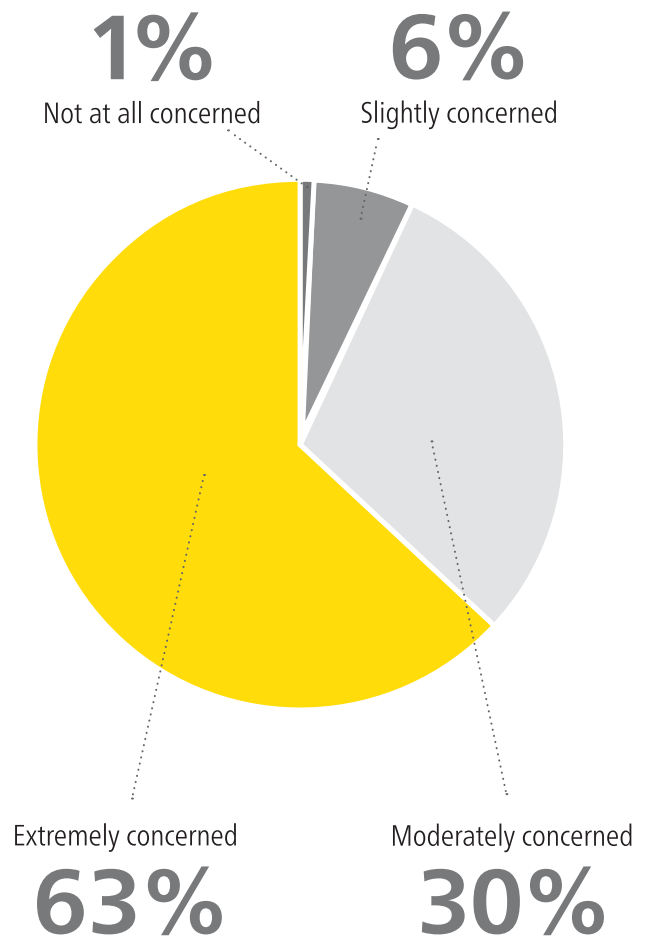


## 5. How concerned are you about the impact of littered single-use items on the environment in York Region?

Respondents expressed nearly universal concern about the impact of littered single-use items on the environment, with 99% expressing slight, moderate or extreme concern.

# 99%

of respondents showed concern about littered single-use items.





## 6. Why are you concerned about the impacts of littered single-use items? Select your top three reasons.

Of those who expressed slight, moderate or extreme concern about the impact of littered single-use items, most pointed to the environment as their top reasons for concern. 72% of respondents noted that impacts to waterways were one of their top reasons, followed by impacts to green spaces (56%) and impacts to wildlife (55%).

In addition, 3% of respondents provided additional reasons for concern, including:

- General concern about wastefulness
- Unsightliness and lack of respect for others using shared outdoor spaces
- Lack of ability for many of these materials to be recycled easily

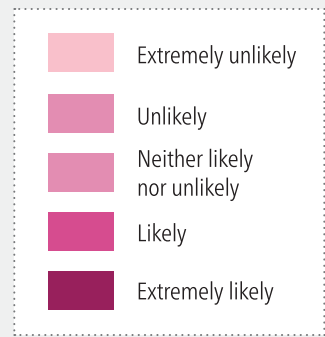


**72%**  
of respondents noted that  
impacts to waterways were  
one of their top concerns.

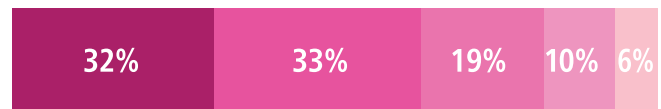
## 7. Would you be more likely to use a single-use item if...

Currently, certain types of single-use plastic cannot be accepted in the blue box in York Region (for example, plastic bags, straws, wrappers). Also, many types of single-use items currently listed as 'compostable' do not break down in York Region's composting facilities.

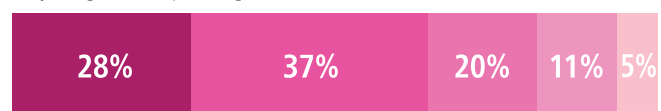
65% of respondents would be more likely to use single-use items if they became accepted in the green bin, and 60% would use them if they were accepted in the blue box. 65% of respondents would use single-use items if stores offered take-back or composting options for their products.



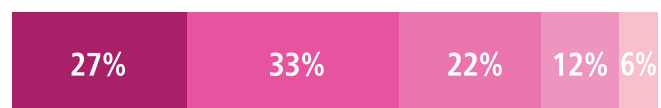
It was accepted in the green bin



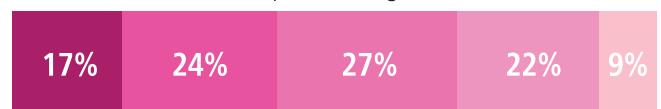
Store or restaurant offers a take back program for proper recycling or composting



It was accepted in the blue box



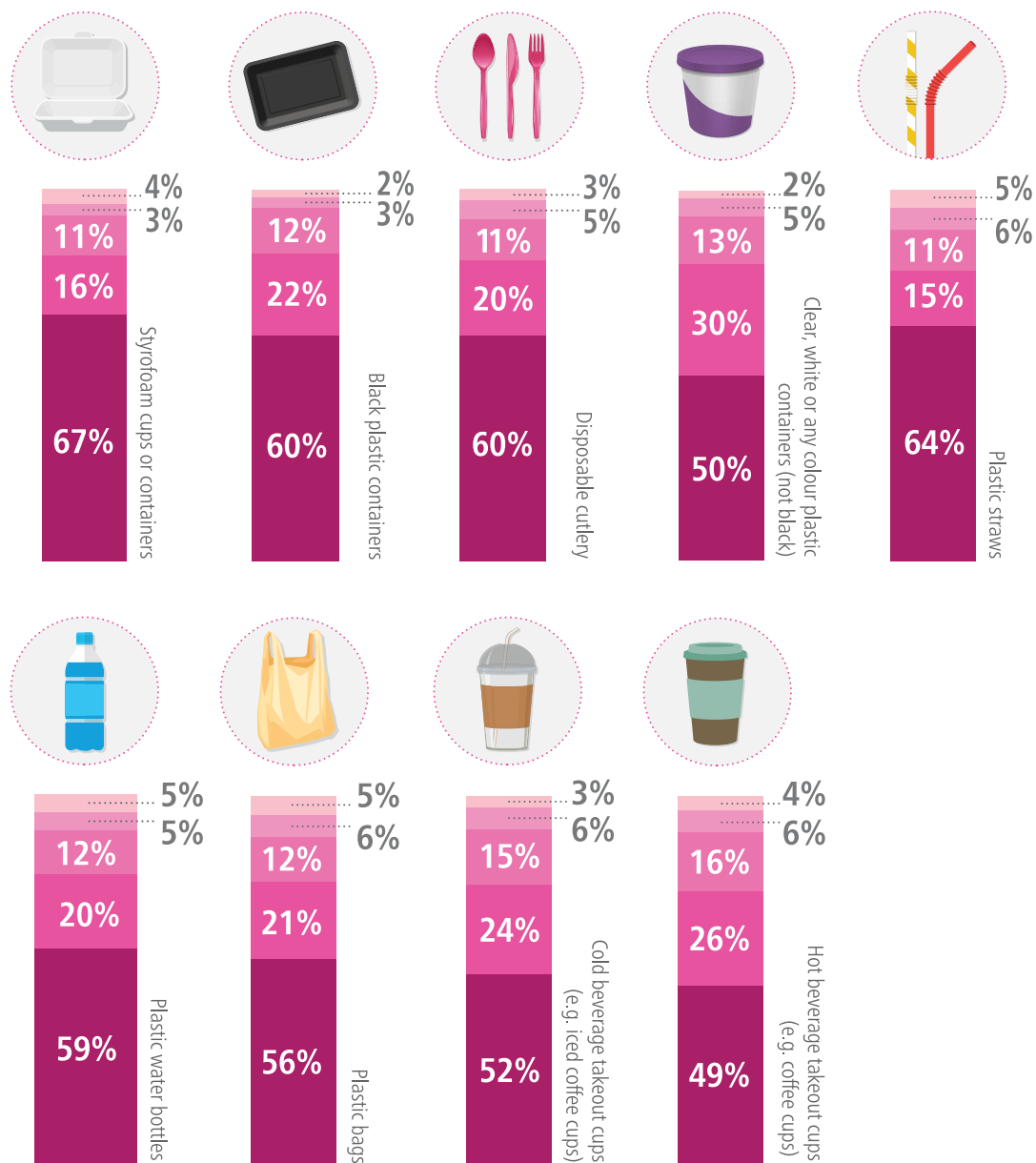
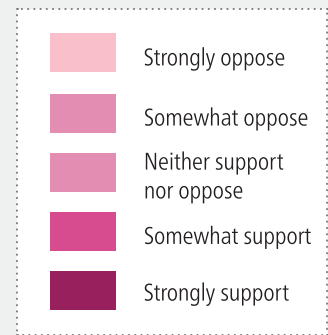
It was labelled as compostable or biodegradable by the manufacturer but not accepted in the green bin



**65% of respondents** would use single-use items if stores offered take-back or composting options for their products.

## 8. Indicate whether you would support or oppose efforts to encourage reduction of the following items in York Region

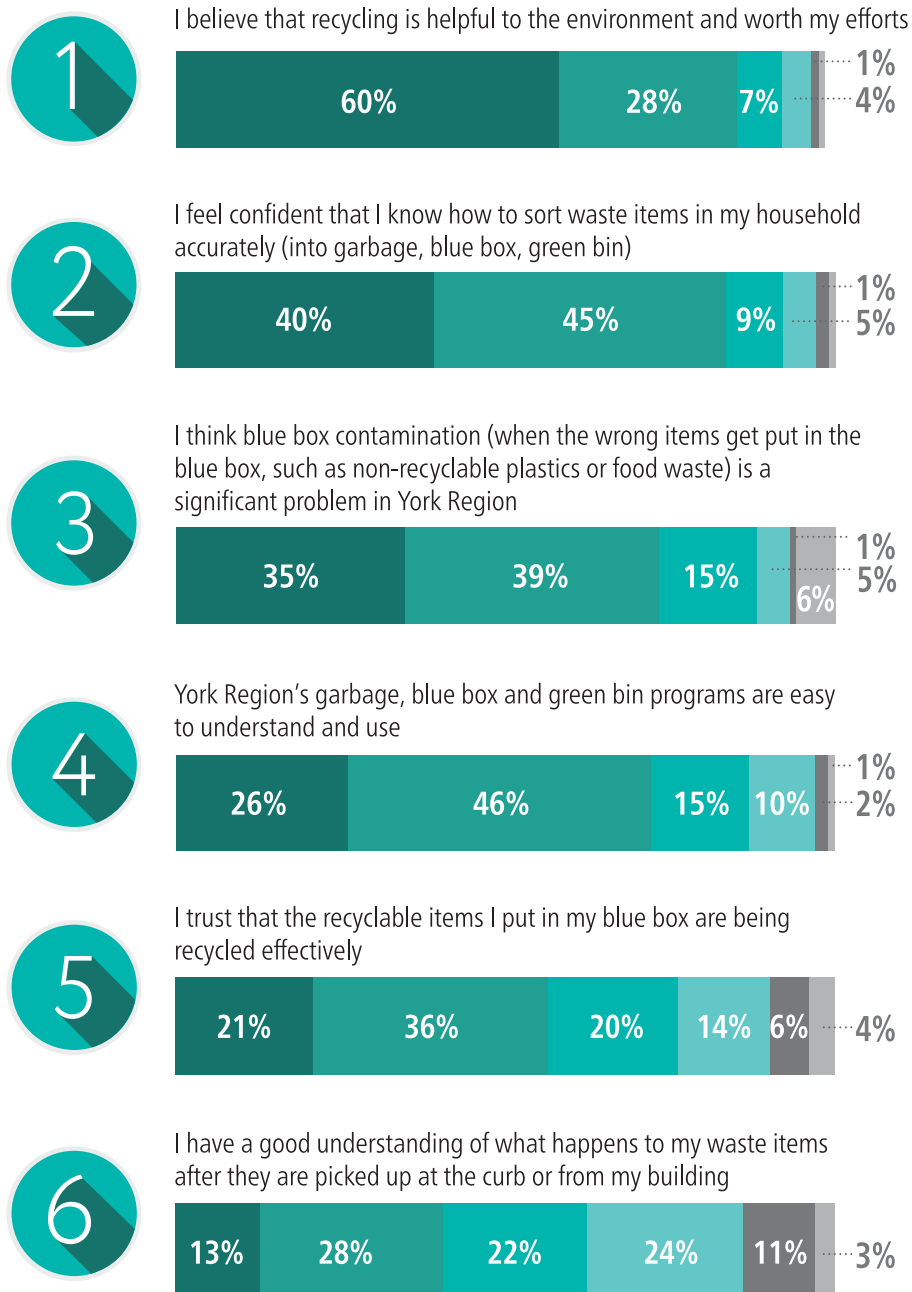
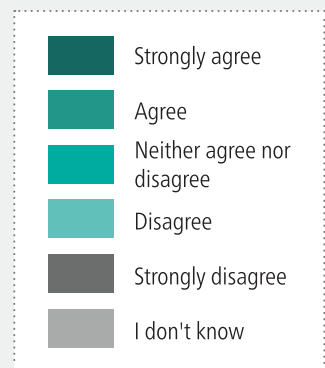
Respondents indicated very strong support overall for reduction of all single-use items mentioned in the survey. Styrofoam cups and containers had the most support (83% support), followed closely by all colours of plastic and disposable cutlery, which had 80% support.



## 9. Sentiments about recycling and blue box contamination

88% of respondents agree that recycling is helpful to the environment and worthwhile. 85% also feel confident in their knowledge of sorting their waste at home, and 74% agree that blue box contamination is a problem in York Region. 72% also agree that York Region's garbage, blue box and green bin programs are easy to understand and use.

However, only 57% of respondents trust that the recyclables they put in their blue boxes are being recycled effectively, and only 41% feel they have a good understanding of what happens to waste after it leaves their curb.



## 10. What do you do when you are unsure which bin a single-use item should go into? Check off all that apply:

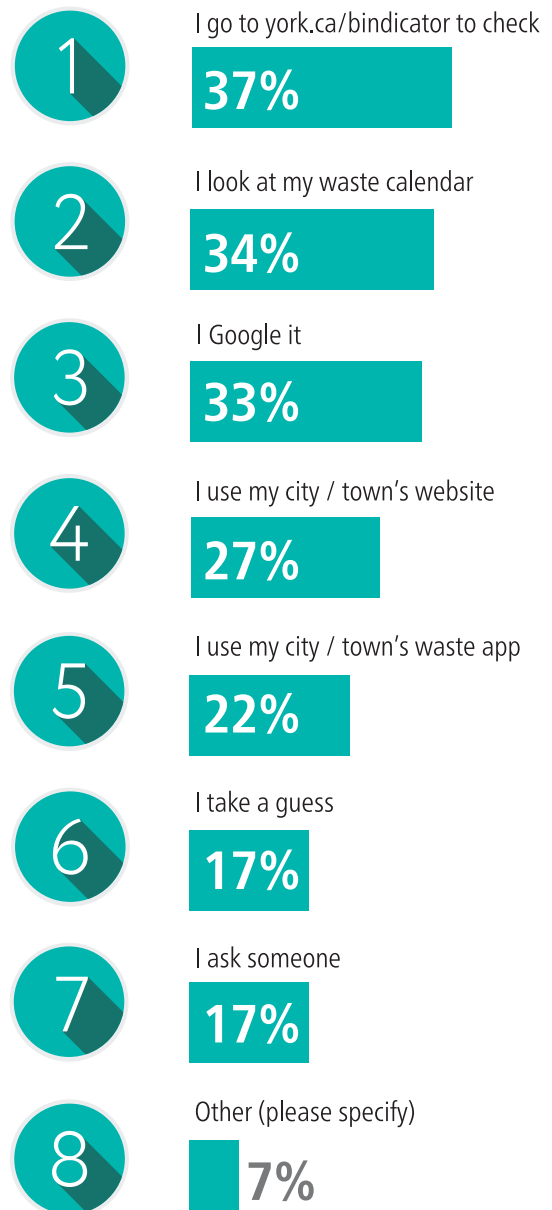
The top location for respondents to get information about where to put a waste item was York Region's online search tool, Bindicator, followed closely by the waste calendars put out by local municipalities.

Of the 7% who selected 'Other', other actions people take include:

- Putting the item in the garbage
- Emailing or phoning their municipality
- Checking their fridge recycling magnet

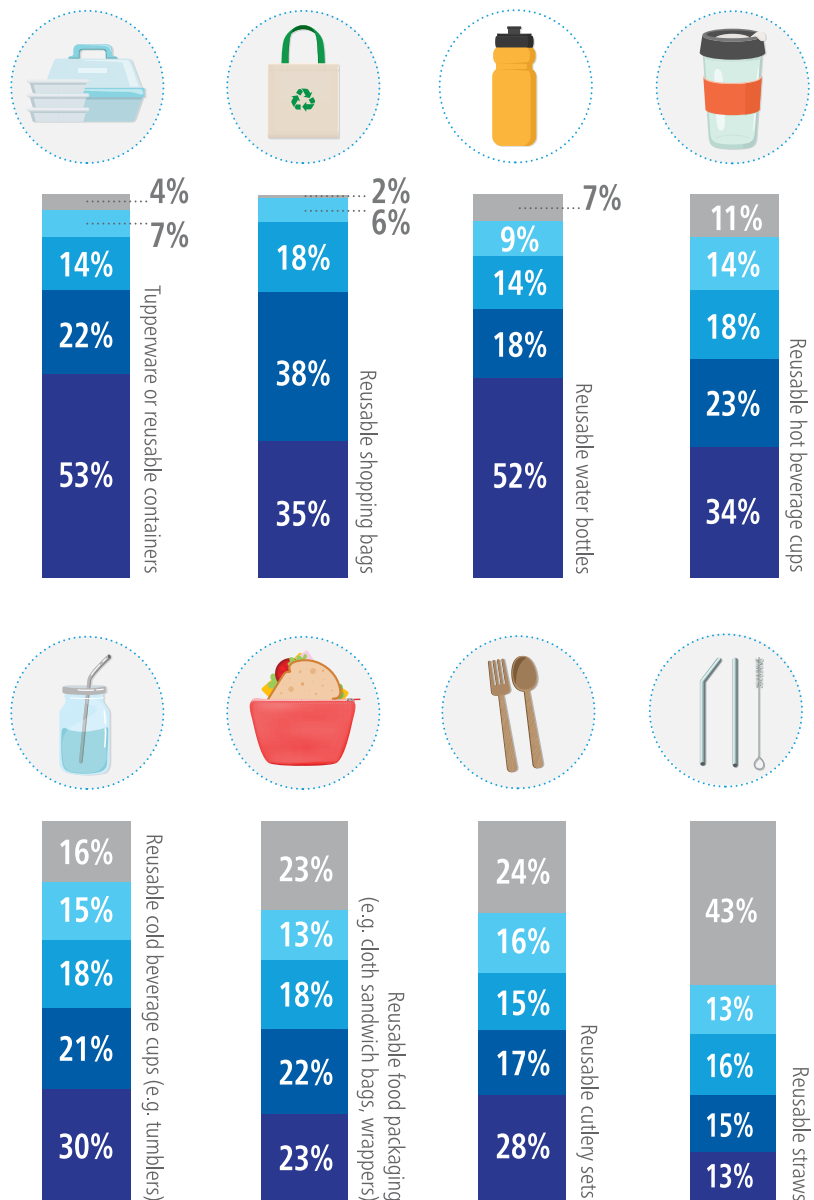
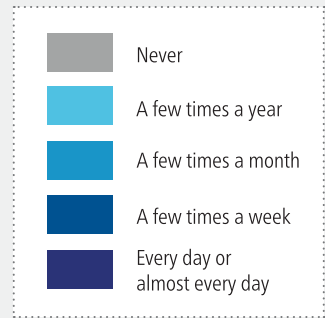


**Only 57% of respondents** trust that the recyclables they put in their blue boxes are being recycled effectively.

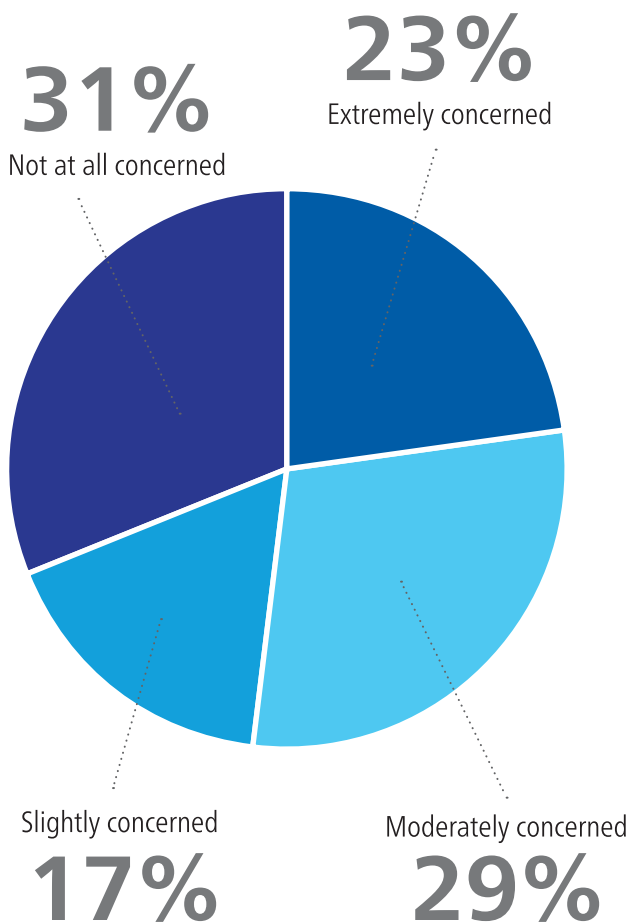


# 11. Prior to COVID-19, how frequently did you use the following reusable items when you were out in the community (not at home)?

Over 70% of respondents reported using common reusable items like reusable containers (Tupperware), water bottles and shopping bags on a frequent (daily or weekly) basis. Reusable cutlery, food packaging (e.g., wraps and sandwich bags) and straws were less frequently used, and 43% reported never using reusable straws.



12. Some businesses stopped accepting reusable items like coffee mugs and cloth bags due to health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. How concerned are you about the safety of using reusable items that you bring from home when out in the community?



**52%**

**of respondents** felt extremely or moderately concerned about the safety of using their reusable items in the community.

### 13. What would make you feel more comfortable using reusable items in the community? Check all that apply.

Of those who expressed a level of concern, 80% indicated there are potential interventions that would make them feel more comfortable using their reusable items in the community, and 20% indicated that nothing would make them feel comfortable.

3% of respondents left additional suggestions about what would increase their comfort level with reusables. Additional ideas included:

- Option for customers to fill the containers themselves (e.g. grocery bags, coffee mugs)
- Alternatively, some would only feel comfortable if only employees handled items (e.g. bulk bins created some discomfort)
- Enforcement for employees to follow hygiene practices
- York Public Health providing policies to businesses on how to refill reusable containers safely



# 20%

of respondents indicated that nothing would make them feel comfortable.



Nothing - I will not use reusables until after COVID-19

20%



If information is posted clearly by the business about their COVID-19 hygiene practices

42%



A reusable deposit return program (I receive a cleaned and disinfected reusable item that I return for cleaning on my next visit)

46%



If the employee did not directly touch my reusable when filling it

47%



## 14. Select the degree to which you agree or disagree with each statement:

Respondents expressed overall support for several interventions that businesses could introduce to reduce single-use items, with the strongest support (87%) for businesses asking customers first before giving out single-use items.



1

I would like shops and restaurants to ask me first before providing me with single-use items



2

I prefer to go to shops and businesses that try to reduce their use of single-use items



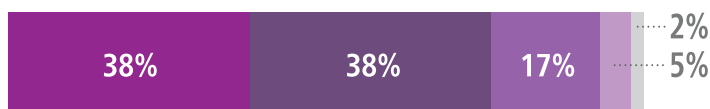
3

I would support a shop or restaurant that had a reusable container service using a deposit return system



4

I would use a program or resource that helps me identify shops and/or restaurants that offer alternatives to single-use items



**87% of respondents** prefer businesses ask customers first before giving out single-use items.

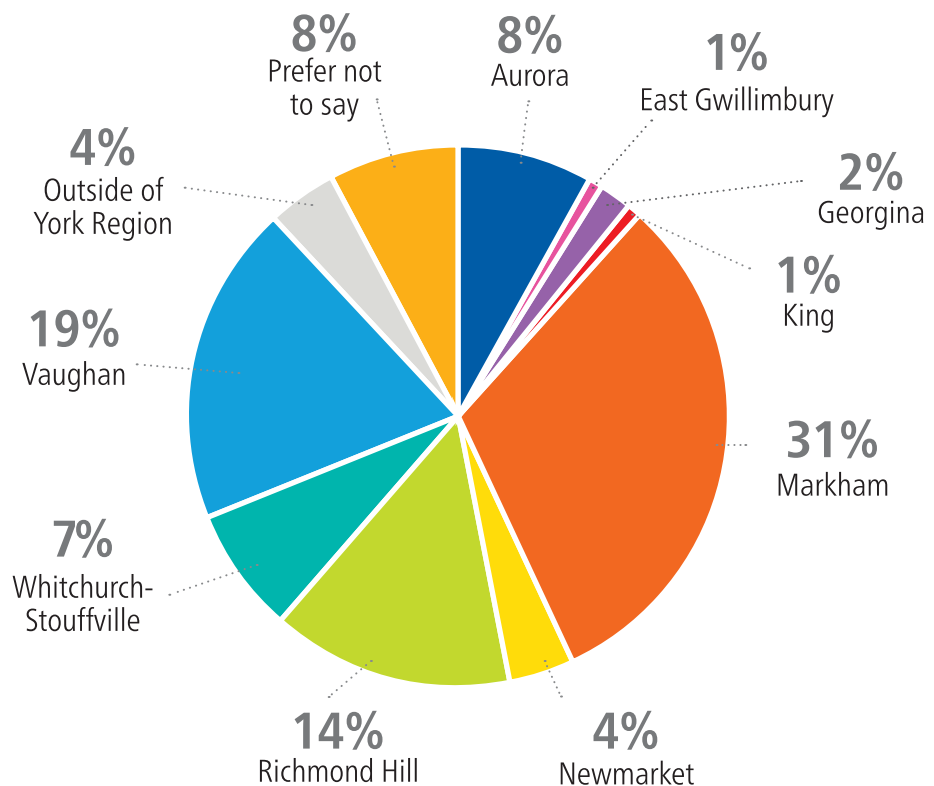


# Waste Quiz

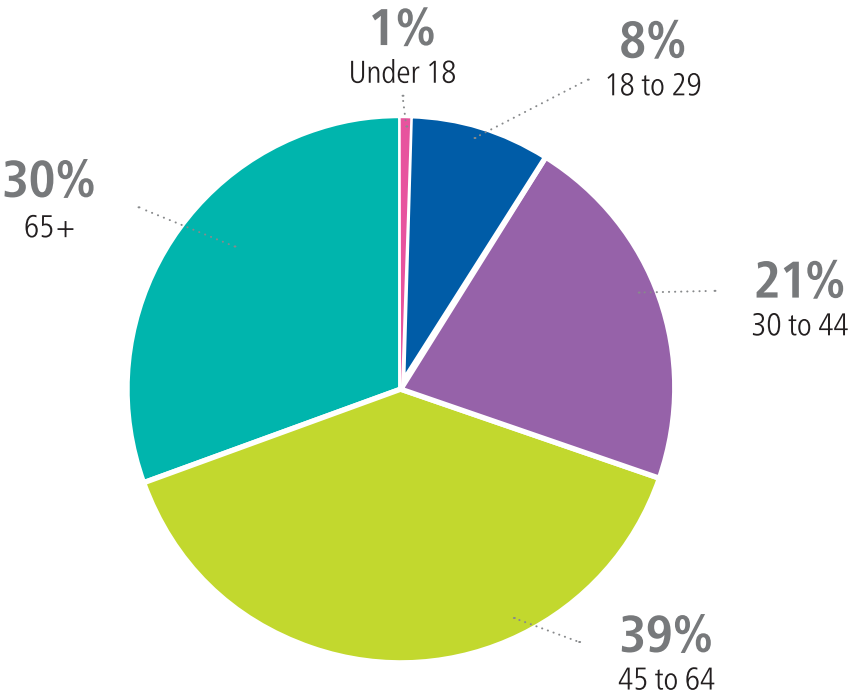
## Detailed Results

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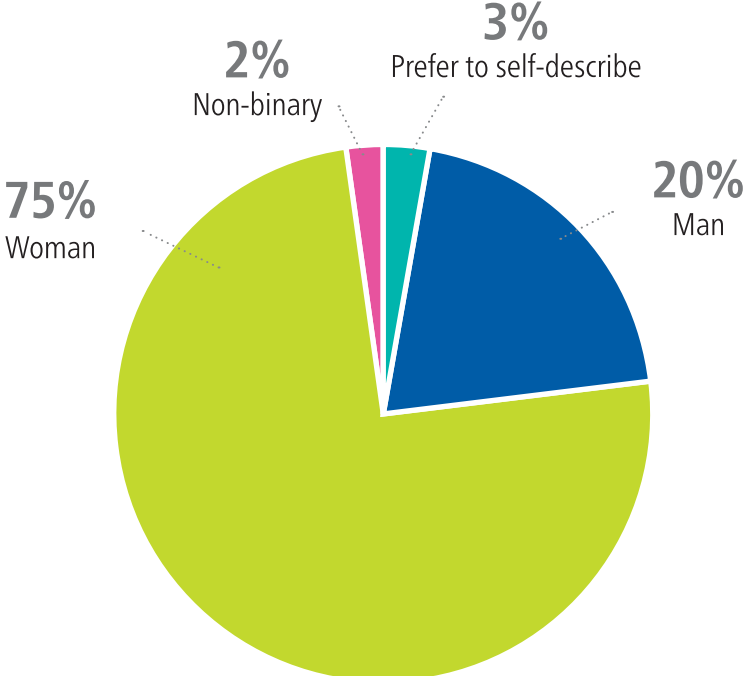
### A. Where do you live?



B. What is your age range?



C. Gender: how do you identify?





1

### Which of the following items should go in the **Blue Box** (recycling)?

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Most respondents correctly identified that boxboard, newspaper, printer paper, and plastic food tubs should go in the blue box. Items that caused the most confusion were coffee cups, Styrofoam containers and facial tissue/paper towels. 78% of respondents got all the answers correct, and the average score was 92%.

2

### Which of the following items should go in the **Green Bin** (compost)?

---

Most respondents correctly identified that diapers, tissues and paper towel, fruit and vegetable scraps and pet waste can go in the green bin. However, other items like coffee pods were incorrectly selected by 25% of respondents. 41% of respondents got everything correct, and the average score was 77%.

# 78%

**of respondents** sorted the items correctly for the blue box, with an average score of 92%.



3

### Which of the following items should go in the **garbage**?

---

While most respondents correctly identified that many common plastic items like baggies and straws should go in the garbage, a significant number of respondents also incorrectly sorted items like diapers, pet waste and textiles into the garbage. (These items can go in the green bin or in the case of textiles, for donation or to a textile collection bin.) 55% correctly sorted coffee pods into the garbage. Only 22% of respondents got all the answers correct, and the average score was 74%.

4

### Which of the following items should you bring to a public drop-off location like a **waste depot** or **collection bin**?

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Almost all respondents correctly identified that batteries should go to a waste depot or other collection point, and nearly two-thirds identified clothing and other textiles. A smaller portion correctly identified plastic checkout bags (which can either go in the garbage or to a public drop-off location). Almost 27% answered that Styrofoam takeout containers can be dropped off at a waste depot, which is true for residents of Markham only; York Region depots only accept large packaging Styrofoam. Only 13% got all the answers correct, and the average score was 58%.

The following pages summarize how respondents sorted the list of items. Percentages shaded in pink indicate the correct answers. Please note there are two correct answers for Plastic Checkout Bags, as York Region promotes a plastic bag take-back program.

Batteries



Blue Box

Green Bin

Garbage

Waste Depot/  
Collection Bin

2%

0%

7%

97%

Boxboard



99%

1%

1%

1%

Coffee pods



12%

25%

55%

3%

Diapers



2%

66%

27%

0%

Disposable  
coffee cups  
and lids



24%

4%

67%

1%

Disposable  
gloves and  
masks



2%

2%

91%

1%

Disposable  
wipes



2%

13%

79%

1%

Facial tissues,  
napkins and  
paper towels



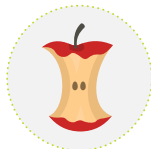
15%

72%

15%

0%

Fruit and  
vegetable  
scraps












1%

98%

1%

0%

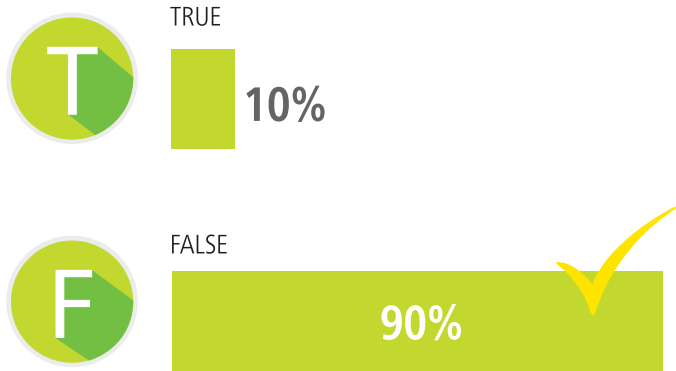
 Correct Answer

		Blue Box	Green Bin	Garbage	Waste Depot/ Collection Bin
Newspaper and printer paper		97%	2%	1%	1%
Old clothes, fabrics, textiles		3%	1%	40%	59%
Pet waste and cat litter		1%	72%	21%	1%
Plastic checkout bags		10%	1%	69%	16%
Plastic film (e.g. cling wrap)		7%	1%	83%	2%
Plastic food tubs (e.g. yogurt)		80%	1%	12%	1%
Resealable plastic baggies (e.g. Ziploc bags)		11%	1%	77%	4%
Straws		8%	1%	84%	1%
Styrofoam takeout containers		15%	1%	64%	27%

 Correct Answer

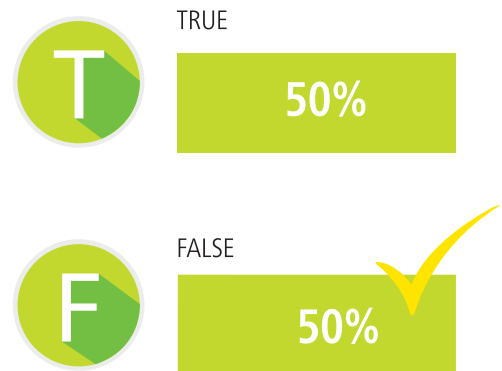
5. **True or false:** It doesn't matter if I accidentally put something non-recyclable into the blue box because it will be sorted at the waste depot later.

90% of respondents correctly answered this question and identified that blue box contamination is a problem. While York Region's Materials Recovery Facility sorts our blue box materials, some items that don't belong are missed and contaminate the recyclables, impacting their recyclability.



6. **True or False:** Cutlery marked 'compostable' is safe to put in the green bin.

Only half of respondents correctly answered that this statement is false. Compostable cutlery should not go in the green bin. At the moment, these materials do not break down in the Region's composting facilities.



# 90%

of respondents correctly answered that blue box contamination is a problem.

# 50%

of respondents correctly identified that compostable cutlery **should not** go in the green bin.



7. What percentage of waste in York Region was **diverted from landfill** in 2020?

Only 13% of respondents selected the correct answer that York Region diverts 93% of its waste from landfill, meaning 93% of our waste is recycled or composted, while the garbage is processed to generate energy, rather than landfilled. 87% chose the wrong answer.

**13%**

**of respondents** correctly identified that York Region diverts 93% of its waste from landfill.



# What's Next?

Feedback received from the survey, quiz and accessibility consultations will inform our approach to reducing single-use items. This includes further engagement with York Region businesses in 2022 to better understand how we, as a society, can transition away from single-use items.

The Region is committed to providing a variety of engagement opportunities that capture the diversity of opinions related to single-use items.

To receive updates about the project in the future, please subscribe to our environmental newsletter, Splash, at [york.ca/reducewaste](http://york.ca/reducewaste)

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