

Households and the Environment Survey, 2011

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Canadian households are using less bottled water at home and an increasing number have installed energy-efficient fixtures. The disposal of increasingly popular electronic devices has become a significant issue for households since these contain materials that should not be disposed of in landfills.

About 22% of households reported that they drank primarily bottled water at home, down from 24% in 2009 and 30% in 2007. In contrast, 68% reported that they drank primarily tap water, an increase from 66% in 2009.

Households are increasingly using water conservation devices in the home. About 63% reported using low-flow shower heads, which are devices that reduce the flow of water. This is more than twice the proportion of 28% in 1991.

About 47% of households in Canada reported having a low-volume toilet in 2011, a five-fold increase from 9% in 1991.

The survey also found that the disposal of household hazardous wastes such as dead or unwanted electronic equipment, old light bulbs and batteries poses a challenge for many households.

In addition, many households lack awareness about radon and its impact on human health. In 2011, 5% of non-apartment households that had heard of radon had tested their homes for its presence.

Energy use and conservation

Most households (92%) reported having a thermostat in 2011. About 54% of these households had programmable thermostats, up from 49% in 2009.

About 60% of households that had a thermostat lowered the temperature overnight during winter, similar to the share in 2009.

Households in Newfoundland and Labrador (70%) were most likely to turn the temperature down. Those in New Brunswick (55%) and Ontario (57%) were the least likely to do so.

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of households with programmable thermostats that had been programmed reported that they lowered the temperature when they were asleep. In contrast, 49% of households with a non-programmable thermostat, or a programmable thermostat that had not been programmed, lowered the temperature.

In 2011, about 87% of households reported that they had at least one of four types of energy-efficient lights in the home: compact fluorescent lights, fluorescent tube lights, halogen lights and light-emitting diodes.

About 76% reported they had at least one compact fluorescent light, 40% reported at least one fluorescent tube light and 34% at least one halogen light.

In Prince Edward Island and Ontario, four out of five households had at least one compact fluorescent light, the highest proportion among the provinces.

Household hazardous waste

Compact fluorescent lights contain mercury and should not be disposed of along with normal household waste. About 23% of households reported having dead or unwanted compact fluorescent lights for disposal.



Nationally, 50% of these households reported that they put these lights in the garbage, the most frequently reported method of disposal. About 24% said they took the lights to a depot or drop-off centre, while 8% returned them to a supplier or retailer. At the time of the survey, 12% of households still had the lights.

About 34% of households had leftover or expired medication for disposal. Of these households, 63% returned the medication to the supplier, retailer, pharmacy or doctor for disposal, up from 57% in 2009. About 21% put it in the garbage.

Electronic devices (e-waste)

Some of the components in electronic devices contain metals and other materials that are considered hazardous waste and should not be disposed of in landfills. As electronic devices become more popular, their disposal at the end of their useful life is a challenge for both households and landfill operators.

About 18% of Canadian households had dead or unwanted cellphones. Of these households, 25% took or sent them to a depot or drop-off centre, while 19% returned them to a supplier or retailer. About 8% donated them or gave them away, while about 5% put them in the garbage. Some 44% of households had dead or unwanted cellphones at the time of the survey.

Radon

Radon is a radioactive gas found naturally in the environment. In a home, it can accumulate to levels that pose a health risk. Over the long term, exposure to radon increases the risk of developing lung cancer, especially for smokers.

In 2011, 40% of Canadian households had heard of radon. Households in Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Saskatchewan were the most likely to have heard of it. Those in Ontario, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador were the least likely.

Of households that had heard of radon, 73% said that radon is a health hazard, up from 68% in 2009. About 9% said it is not a health hazard, and 17% did not know one way or the other.

Note to readers

The Households and the Environment Survey (HES) measures the behaviours of Canadian households with respect to the environment. It is a biennial survey, conducted under the umbrella of the Canadian Environmental Sustainability Indicators program, a broader initiative of Statistics Canada, Environment Canada and Health Canada.

First conducted in 1991, HES was subsequently conducted in 1994, 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2011. Some of the environmental variables from the first cycle continue to be measured, but many new topics have been introduced over the years.

This report presents the results of six major themes covered by the 2011 HES: the consumption and conservation of water and of energy, indoor environment, household hazardous waste and purchasing decisions.

HES surveyed roughly 20,000 households.

Available in CANSIM: tables 153-0059, 153-0060, 153-0062, 153-0063, 153-0066, 153-0098 and 153-0104.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 3881.

The publication *Households and the Environment*, 2011 (11-526-X), is now available from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

The CD-ROM *Households and the Environment Survey: Public Use Microdata File*, 2011 (16M0001X), is also available from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website under *Publications*.

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