

Households and the Environment Survey, 2021

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Single-use plastics

Single-use plastics, such as plastic bags, plastic bottles and plastic drinking straws, are major components of pollution. In early 2022, the Government of Canada implemented a plastics reduction strategy that aims to transition from single-use plastics to more environmentally friendly substitutes, such as paper or biocompostable plastics. Included on the list of products that will become less available are plastic drinking straws. Results from the Households and the Environment Survey can help demonstrate the progress being made in the reduction of single-use plastics.

Straws

Plastic drinking straws were used by 1 in 5 (20%) Canadian households in 2021, down slightly from 23% in 2019. Among these households, about half (52%) used one or two straws per week in 2021, while 2 out of 5 (39%) used four or more per week. The use of plastic drinking straws was most prevalent in Manitoba, where just under one-third (29%) of households used them, with 41% of those households using four or more per week.

Bags

In 2021, almost all Canadian households (97%) reported using their own bags or containers when grocery shopping. Of these households, 51% always did this, up from 43% in 2019. Households in Newfoundland and Labrador (89%), Prince Edward Island (88%) and Nova Scotia (81%) were about twice as likely to have always used them compared with households in Ontario (41%), Manitoba (49%), Saskatchewan (39%), Alberta (41%) and British Columbia (44%).

Reusable water bottles

Reusable water bottles offer an alternative solution to purchasing single-use water bottles. They come in a variety of shapes, sizes and materials that allow the user to have water with them wherever they go. In 2021, 9 in 10 Canadian households had at least one person who used their own water bottle, with 85% of those households doing so always or often.

Households in Lethbridge (97%) led the way in using the most reusable water bottles among the census metropolitan areas in Canada, followed by Kingston, Greater Sudbury and Thunder Bay (95% each), while St. Catharines–Niagara (85%) and Peterborough (84%) brought up the rear.

Refillable cups and mugs

In 2021, 86% of households reported drinking hot drinks outside the home, such as at work or school, or when in transit. Most reported doing this on a daily or weekly basis.

Using a refillable cup or mug when out and about means that you do not need to use a disposable cup when you drink your morning coffee or tea (or any other hot drink). Of those households where at least one person drank hot drinks outside the home, most (79%) used a refillable cup or mug when they could, rather than a disposable cup. Almost half (46%) of these households reported doing so always or often. While households in Quebec were least likely to have one or more persons who consumed hot drinks outside the home, they were most likely to have always or often used their own cup or mug (52%).



Electronic waste

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, [Canadian households have increased their screen time](#), using the Internet to maintain contact with family and friends, access entertainment, buy food and goods, access government services, and telework. To support this shift online, [Canadians are spending more money on technology](#), including computers, laptops and tablets.

When these consumer electronics are no longer wanted, it poses a unique disposal challenge for households. The materials consumer electronics contain should not be disposed of in the traditional waste stream, such as a landfill or incinerator, and instead need to be treated as a form of hazardous waste and disposed of using a special program.

Fewer households had e-waste

In 2021, 38% of Canadian households reported having at least one type of unwanted electronic device to dispose of, down 5 percentage points from 2019, and most used a depot or drop-off centre. E-waste includes computers, printers, cellphones, televisions, audio visual equipment, gaming equipment, landline telephones and microwave ovens.

[An increasing proportion of households](#) are choosing to repair, sell, or donate or give away their unwanted cellphones. When it came time to retire a cellphone in 2021, 6% of households repaired or sold their device, compared with 1% in 2011, and 12% donated them or gave them away, up from 8% in 2011.

Computers, cellphones and televisions are among the most frequently reported types of e-waste

In 2021, computers, cellphones and televisions were among the most-frequently reported types of e-waste, with 15% of households having computers to dispose of, 14% having cellphones, and 14% having televisions.

Sustainable Development Goals

On January 1, 2016, the world officially began implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), the United Nations' transformative plan of action that addresses urgent global challenges over the next 15 years. The plan is based on 17 specific sustainable development goals.

The Households and the Environment Survey is an example of how Statistics Canada supports the reporting on the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. This release will help to measure the following goals:



Note to readers

The Households and the Environment Survey (HES) asks Canadian households about their activities and behaviours with respect to the environment. It covers a wide variety of topics including water and energy consumption and conservation, hazardous products used in the home and the household's interactions with nature. Data from the survey are used by governments to guide policies and programs, by researchers to learn more about Canadians and by individuals to see how they compare with the rest of the country.

In 2021, the HES surveyed approximately 38,000 households.

The target population of the 2021 HES consisted of households in Canada, excluding: households located in Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut; households located on reserves and in other Indigenous settlements in the provinces; and households located on Canadian Forces Bases. Institutions, collectives and households in certain remote regions were also excluded.

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

Available tables: [38-10-0144-01](#) and [38-10-0154-01](#) to [38-10-0156-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [3881](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).