

Biennial Waste Management Survey, 2020

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Waste diversion in Canada

Canadians are concerned about the amount of waste they produce. Households are shifting the ways in which they manage their plastic, food, electronic and hazardous waste to keep it from being disposed of in a landfill or an incinerator. Recycling, composting, sending unwanted household items to depots or drop-off centres, or opting for a reusable mug, straw or shopping bag while on the go can contribute to waste diversion at the household level. In 2020, Canadian businesses and households diverted almost 10 million tonnes of material from landfills, up by 4% (352 000 tonnes) from 2018.

The two most populous provinces, Ontario (3.5 million tonnes) and Quebec (2.6 million tonnes), diverted the most waste in 2020, while Newfoundland and Labrador (+13%) and British Columbia (+6%) had the greatest increases in waste diversion of all materials since 2018. In Newfoundland and Labrador, this was about an extra 5 500 tonnes. In British Columbia, 103 000 extra tonnes of discarded goods avoided being buried in a landfill or incinerated.

Plastic waste

Diverting plastic waste to avoid its disposal has become a challenge because of the many types of hard-to-recycle plastics being produced for consumption and entering the waste stream. [A large majority of plastic material continued to be permanently disposed of in landfills](#). Diversion efforts targeting plastic materials began through the Canada-wide Action Plan on Zero Plastic Waste to meet the goal of zero plastic waste by 2030.

On the diversion side, in 2020, almost 370 000 tonnes of plastic was sent to material recycling facilities (where recyclable materials are brought to be sorted and prepared for sale) or transfer facilities (where materials are dropped off or temporarily stored before their final disposition). Quebec (+36%), Manitoba (+18%), Newfoundland and Labrador (+16%), Prince Edward Island (+13%) and Alberta (+6%) reported increases in the amount of diverted plastic material.

Organic waste growth

In 2020, organic waste diverted from landfills surpassed 3 million tonnes, up by 10% (274 000 tonnes) compared with the previous cycle from 2018. In Saskatchewan, more than 40 000 tonnes of organic waste was diverted from the province's landfills in 2020, up by 23% (almost 7 500 tonnes) from 2018.

With more than 2.5 million tonnes collected from residential sources, municipalities across the country continued their efforts in organic waste diversion. Residents have participated in these efforts, either through curbside collection programs or the use of backyard composters.

Recycling of ferrous and mixed metals increase, electronics decrease

At the national level, there was a 16% increase in ferrous metals (such as tin and steel) sent for recycling in 2020 compared with 2018. Recycled mixed metals (a catch-all group that includes ferrous and non-ferrous metals) also increased by 13% from 2018 to 2020.

In 2020, the amount of copper and aluminum diverted from Canadian landfills fell by 42%, mainly because of the 67% decrease in copper and aluminum that came from non-residential sources. [Prices for basic and semi-finished products of aluminum and aluminum alloys also dropped by almost 8% in 2020](#). These decreases may have been the effects of restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in full or partial shutdowns in some industrial sectors. Meanwhile, residential sources of copper and aluminum increased by 14% from 2018 to 2020.



Nationally, in 2020, the volume of electronic products diverted from landfills was down by 10%, following a steady increase since 2012. The pandemic may have played a role in Canadian household electronics retention because of increased screen time during lockdowns. In 2021, 38% of Canadian households reported having at least one type of unwanted electronic device to dispose of, compared with 43% in 2019.

Materials, by source

In 2018, the biennial Waste Management Survey began capturing source information for each type of diverted material reported in the survey. Therefore, it is now possible to examine how external factors, such as the pandemic or new governmental waste policies, can affect the amount of waste diverted by households and businesses.

Residential sources of diverted construction, renovation and demolition materials increased by 6% to 125 000 tonnes in 2020 as home renovations and improvements rose during the on-and-off COVID-19 lockdowns since March 2020.

Note to readers

Waste disposal data from the 2020 biennial Waste Management Survey will be released in 2023.

Available tables: table [38-10-0138-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2009](#).

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).