

Wellington Region Environmental Behaviour Survey

1. Introduction

This report summarises some of the main results from the 2001 survey of 1000 regional residents. The purpose of the survey is to find out what people do, if anything, to look after the environment in their day to day lives, and what they know about pollution and how to prevent it. The information will be used to inform many of the Council's environmental initiatives and, in particular, its education programmes. It will assist us to target our actions to the issues that are important and devise more effective methods and strategies for increasing environmental awareness. It will also serve as a baseline so that in years to come we can retest to see if there have been any changes, and whether our programmes are being successful.

The amount of information in the survey is considerable. This report is only a summary of some key findings and it presents little in the way of analysis to show differences according to such factors as district, age, gender, income, or environmental attitude. The information will be "mined" over the next year to provide more detailed breakdowns about specific subsets of the community which will assist with a number of current projects, as well as providing guidance for the Council in its future strategic planning processes (e.g., next LTFS).

2. Overall Condition of the Environment

In general, the people of the Wellington Region are up-beat about their environment. *Seventy one percent of residents surveyed rated the overall condition of the natural environment as very good or good, 24% as average, 3% as poor and 1% as very poor.*

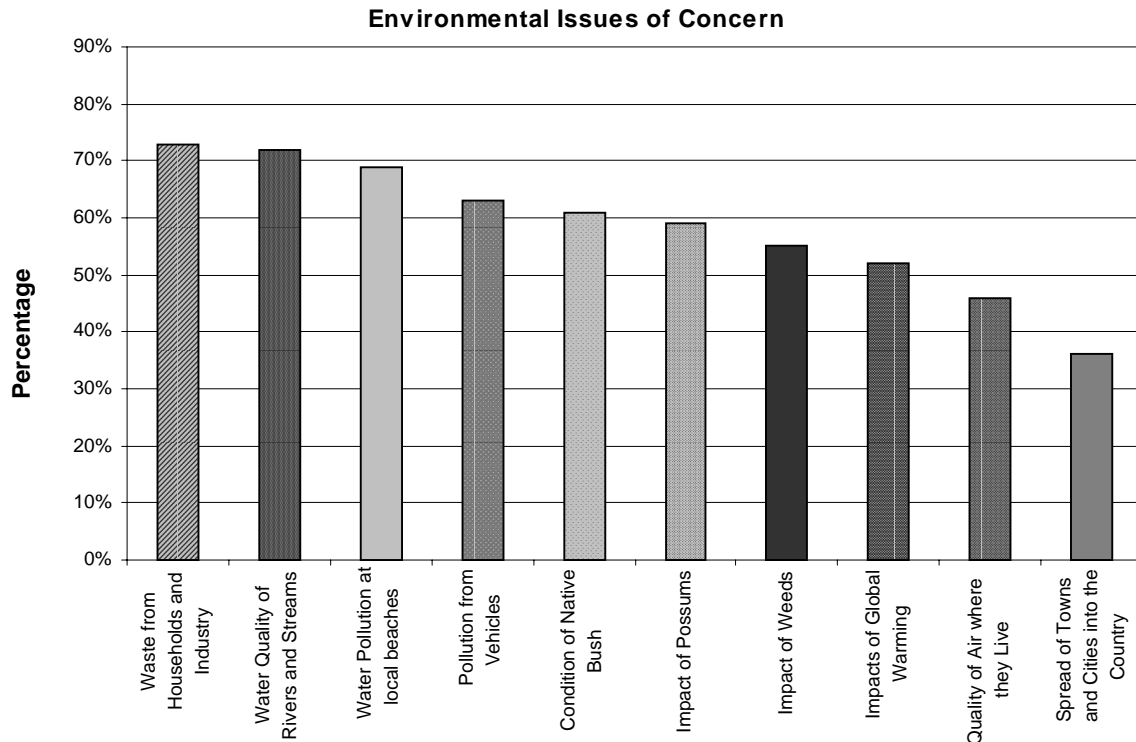
3. Environment Getting Better or Worse

Respondents were also mildly optimistic about the *direction* of the condition of the environment. Thirty two percent thought the overall condition of the environment was getting better, 14% that it was getting worse and 51% that it was staying the same. This barometer of public feeling (along with "overall condition") could be repeated in years to come as one way of measuring broadly the success of the Council's environmental stewardship.

4. Most Important Issues

Figure 1 shows levels of concern about a range of environmental issues (the issues were prompted). The issue of most concern is "waste from households and industry" (73% of the sample expressed concern about the issue on a scale

from “not concerned at all” to “very concerned”). This was followed closely by “water quality of rivers and streams” (72%), “water quality at local beaches” (69%), “pollution from vehicles” (63%), “the condition of native bush” (61%), and “the impact of possums” (59%).



More than half of regional residents expressed concern about “the impact of weeds such as Old Man’s Beard and Gorse” (55%) and a similar number were worried about “the impact of global warming” (52%). Forty six per cent were concerned about “the quality of the air where they live” (46%). The issue of least concern was “the spread of cities and towns into the country”, with a little more than a third of residents being bothered by it (36%).

Points to note from this are:

- The amount of waste we produce is clearly of concern to the people of the Region.
- When a similar question was asked in a recent national survey by the Ministry for the Environment, waste ranked sixth of seven issues¹.
- The quality of fresh water remains close to the top of this list (as it does in many similar surveys undertaken in New Zealand)²
- People are concerned about global warming but the issue does not have a lot of traction yet. The relative level of concern in this Region about

¹ UMR Research Ltd for the NZ Climate Change Programme, “Climate Change Issues: A Study of Public Awareness and Level of Concern”, March 2001, p.17.

² For example, see the November 2000 survey by Environment Waikato of 1900 regional residents, which sees water quality as the most important issue, with waste the second most important.

global warming is about the same as in evidence nationally, where it ranks fifth of seven issues (although the gap between the top issue and global warming is much closer in the national survey).

- It is curious that pollution from vehicles is of concern to about two thirds of our respondents but less than half are worried about the air where they live.
- Concern about local air quality was marginally higher in Upper Hutt (51%), Wairarapa (48%), and Porirua (48%) than in other districts. Recent air quality monitoring results for Upper Hutt and Masterton have shown some instance of poor air quality.
- Concern about the state of native bush is remarkably uniform across the Region, with no one district showing greater or lesser levels of concern.
- Not unexpectedly, Wairarapa residents were somewhat more concerned about possums and pest plants and significantly less concerned about water quality at local beaches than residents of other districts (water quality at Wairarapa beaches being generally good).

In the past the Council has concentrated on water quality (both of fresh waters and the sea) and not given as much attention to solid waste issues which were generally seen as a territorial authority responsibility. This has changed somewhat since the Council increased its investment in the environment last year and steps are being taken to address this issue (e.g., sponsorship of the materials exchange and environmental education for businesses).

Yet the accumulation of wastes from households and industry is clearly a concern for people and could be one of the issues to address more fully in partnership with the community as the Council strives towards sustainable development.

5. **Environmental Behaviour**

The ways in which people live their lives day-to-day have a fundamental bearing on the environment. While the large industrial pollution spill may grab the headlines, much more environmental degradation occurs simply through the accumulated minor impacts of the everyday activities of people and communities. The survey examined environmental behaviour in the Region in three ways by exploring:

- Personal involvement in environmental causes, organisations;
- Environmentally responsible behaviour at the household level (e.g. recycling, composting, energy use); and
- The ways in which people dispose of household wastes and levels of knowledge about various means of disposal.

5.1 Involvement in Environmental Organisations

Sixteen percent of regional residents declared that in the last year or so they had been involved on a regular basis in an environmental cause or organisation. This involvement was reasonably even across districts and highest amongst people on lower to middle incomes (\$25,000 to \$40,000 personal income).

The involvement of older people in environmental work which characterises the Council's care programme is reflected in levels of involvement across the Region. Involvement was lower amongst under 30 year olds than other age groups, and it increases with age, with 19% declaring involvement in the 60 plus age group.

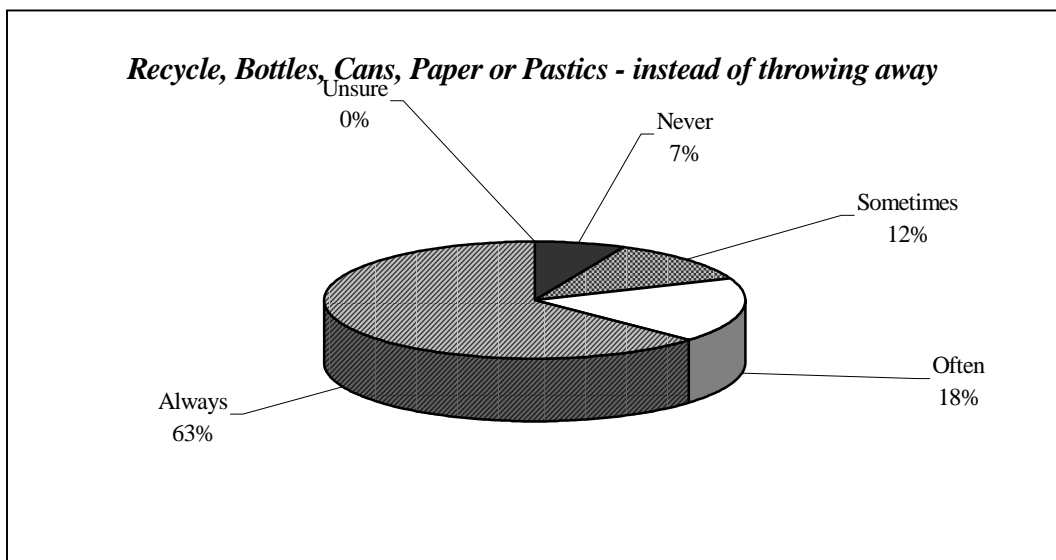
Other forms of participation include giving money to an environmental organisation and taking part in organised activities to help the environment. Fully one third of respondents reported contributing money in the past year and 15% said they had been involved in an environmental activity (such as a beach or stream clean up).

5.2 Environmentally Responsible Behaviour by Households

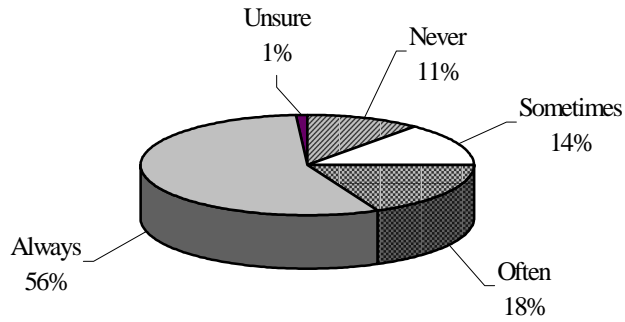
The survey investigated the prevalence of a number of simple personal or household actions which contribute towards a healthier environment. These were:

- Composting food or garden wastes;
- Recycling ;
- Buying household products which the individual thinks are better for the environment;
- Getting the car tuned regularly;
- Reducing water consumption;
- Reducing car use; and
- Washing clothes in cold water to save power.

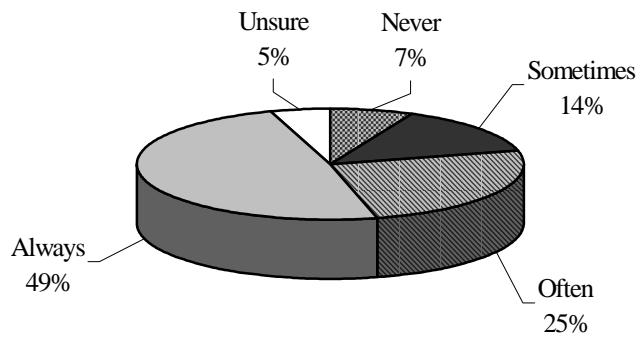
The results at the regional level are shown in the following pie-graphs.



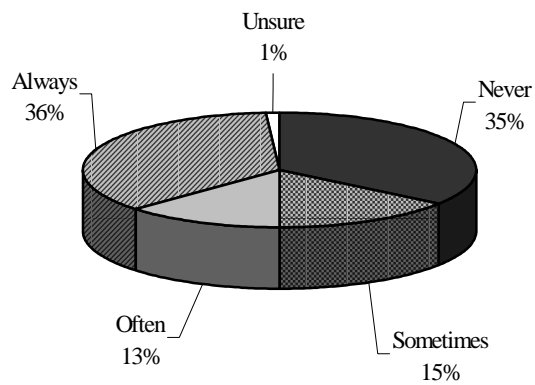
Wash Clothes in Cold Water to Save Power



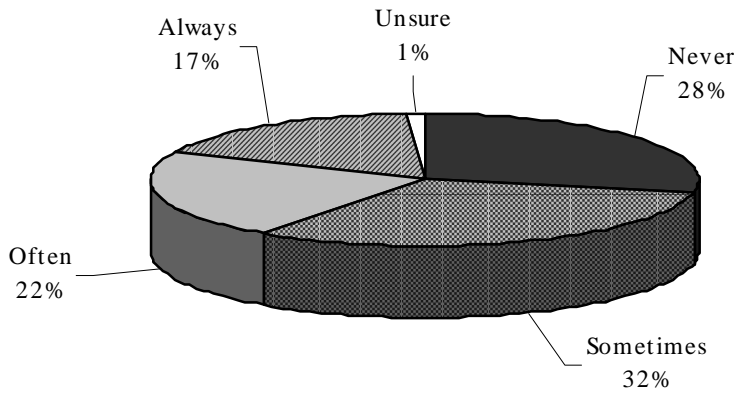
Get the Car Tuned Regularly



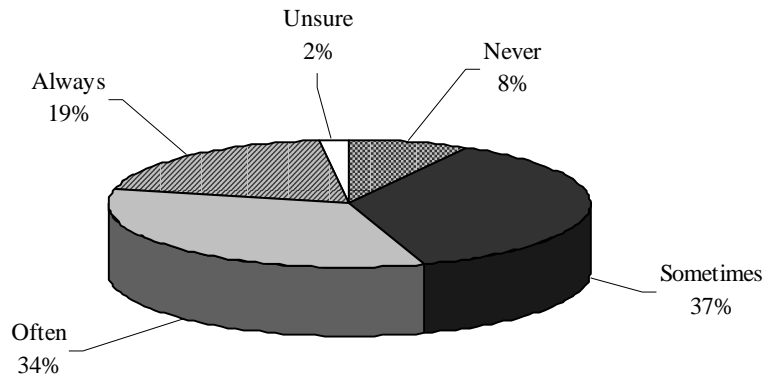
Compost your Food or Garden Wastes



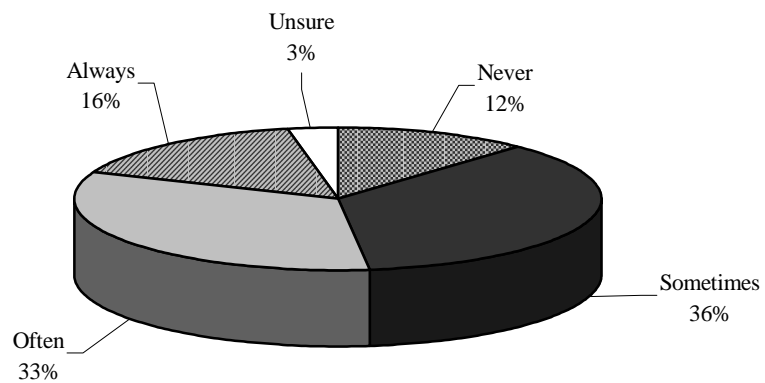
Use Trains, Buses, Walk or Bike to Reduce Car Use

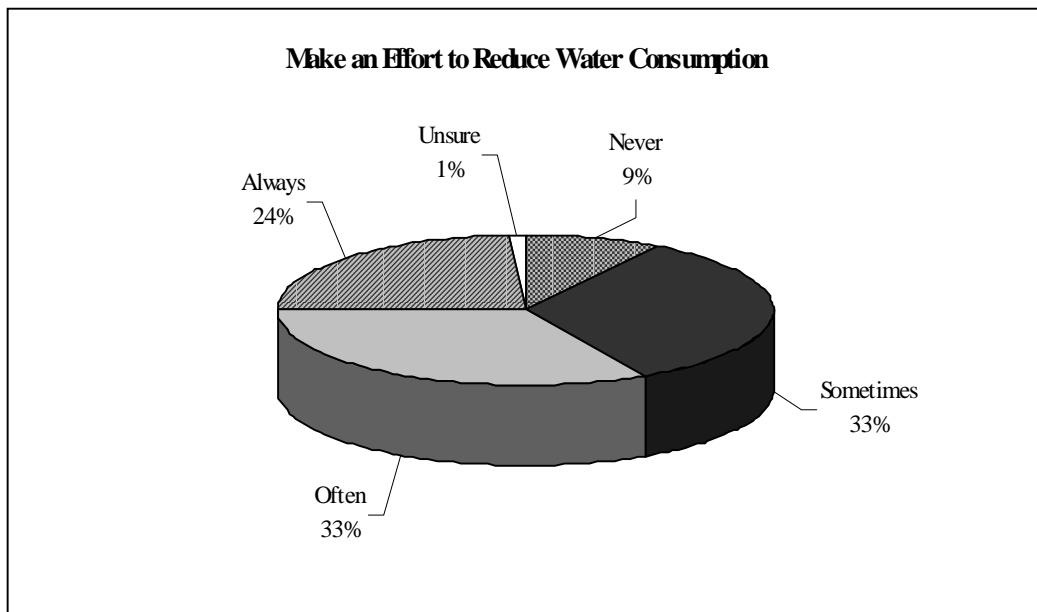


Buy Household Products that you think are better for the Environment



Choose Products with Labels that say 'Are good for the Environment'





Points to note from this are:

- A very high number of people report always (63%) or often (18%) recycling bottles, cans, paper or plastic instead of throwing them away. These numbers are so high that they require further investigation. Wellington, Lower Hutt, and Wairarapa respondents declared the highest levels of recycling behaviour.
- When the same question was asked of Waikato residents last year, 37% said they always recycled and 24% did so often³.
- Across all of the residents in the Wellington Region, 56% declared they always washed clothes using cold water to save power, and 18% often. (The survey was undertaken before the recent power shortage).
- Over 60 year olds are the least likely group to use cold water for clothes washing.
- Women are slightly more likely than men to consider environmental impact as a criteria when buying household products and to use a cold clothes wash to save power.
- Across all regional residents, a quarter said they always make an effort to reduce water consumption, and a third often. The greatest incidence of declared water conservation by district was in Kapiti, with a combined always/often rating of 78%.
- There is considerable potential in encouraging people to compost food or garden wastes. Only a third always compost, and a similar number never do. The highest combined always/often combination for composting was Wairarapa at 67% and the lowest was Wellington at 45%.
- In the Waikato, composting is a much more popular activity. Sixty-five percent always/often compost their food or garden wastes.

³ Environment Waikato, "Environmental Perceptions Survey 2000 – Summary of Results", Report to Environment Committee, 1 March 2001, p.7.

- Wellington city residents were the most likely to walk, ride or take public transport to reduce their car use, and Wairarapa residents were the least likely.

5.3 Environmental Knowledge

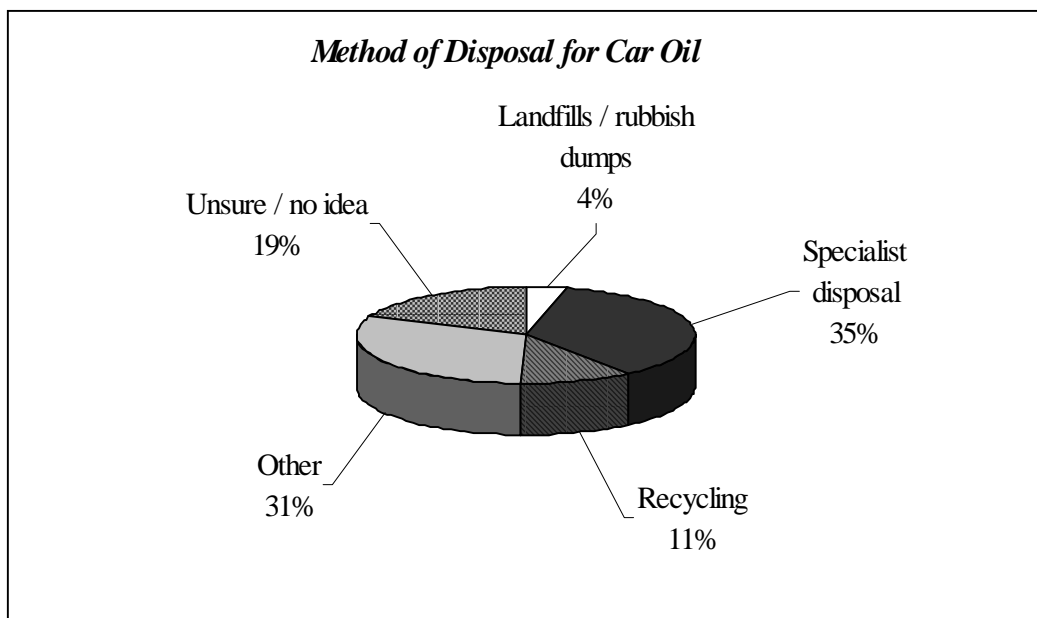
The central preoccupation of the survey is to determine what people know about living in an environmentally sustainable way and thus what we might focus on through our education or information programmes. To test this a number of questions were asked about how people had or would dispose of common pollutants from around the home (garden rubbish, paint, car wash water etc).

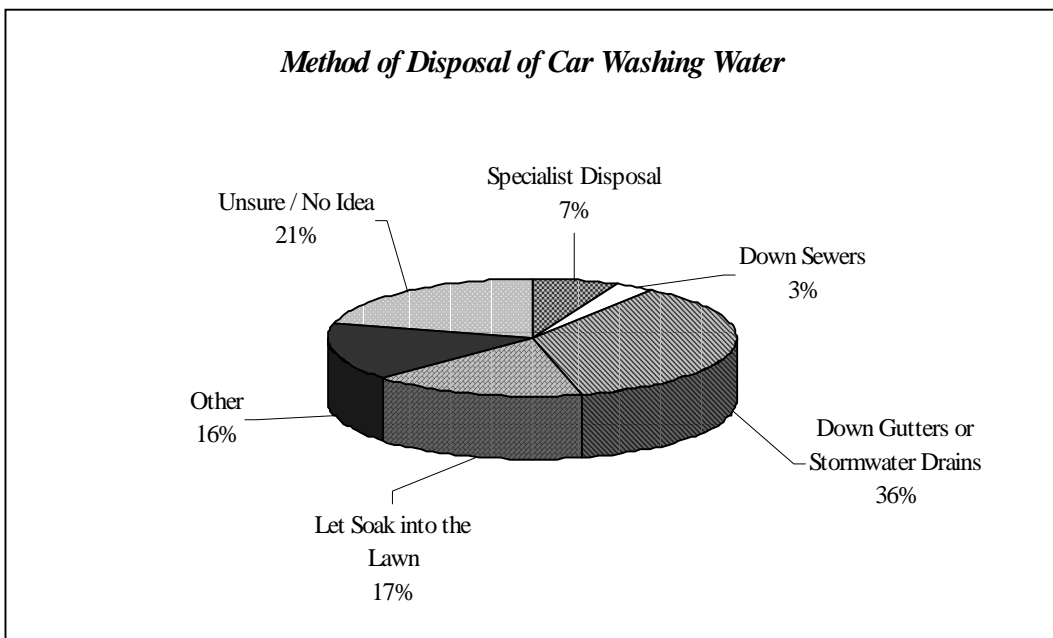
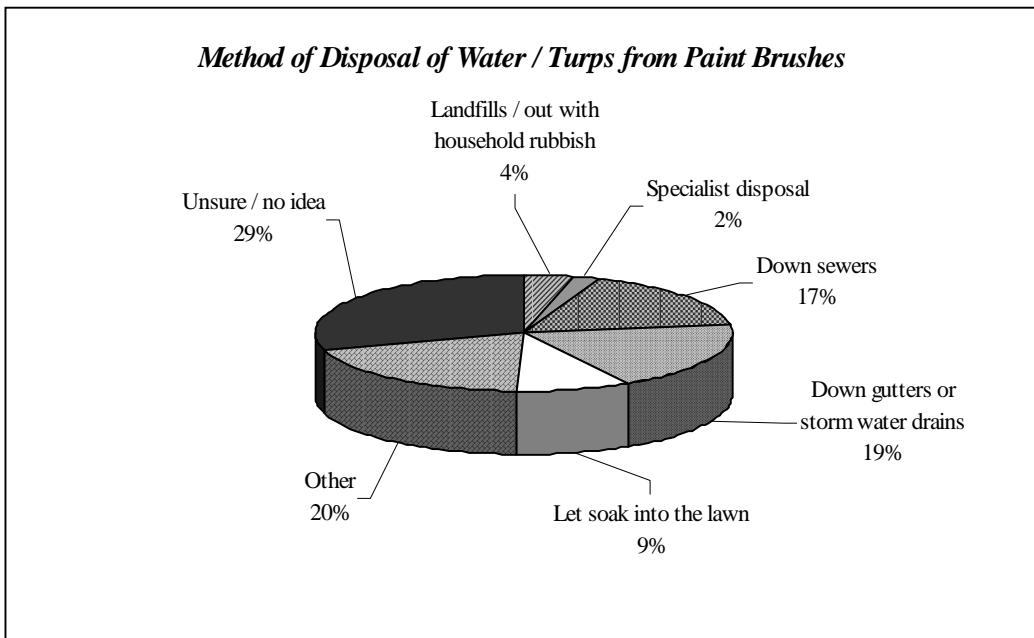
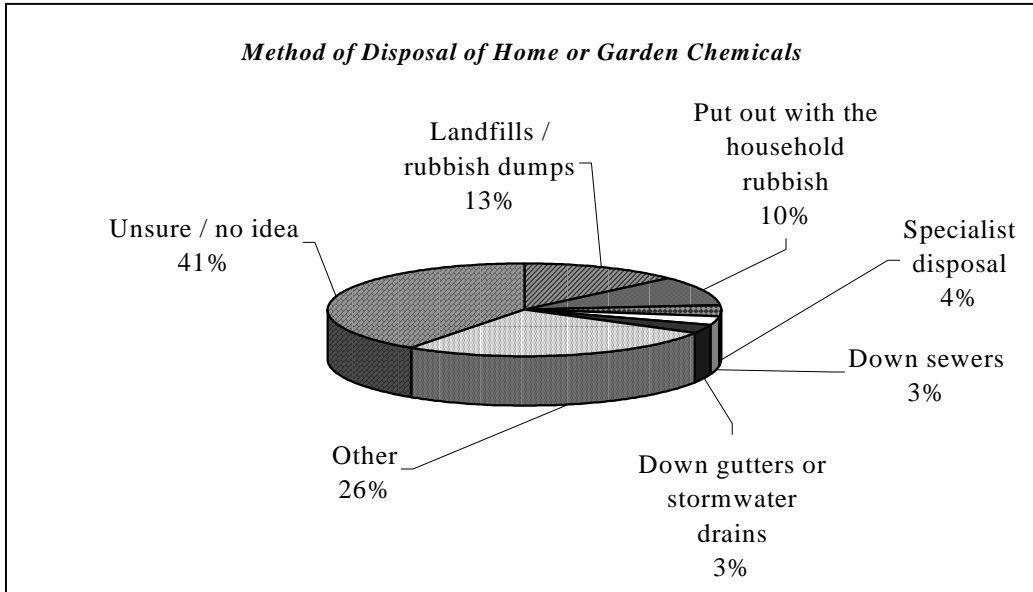
Clearly, there are ways of doing these things which are more environmentally friendly than others. To be able to infer what people know from the actions they take, we have to assume that they would take the more sustainable option if they knew what it was. While this assumption is undoubtedly not universally true, we can gain some comfort from the fact that 78% of respondents said they would dispose of things properly if they knew where to take them. Of course, there are also many reasons why people don't do the "right" thing in any given situation even when they know it.

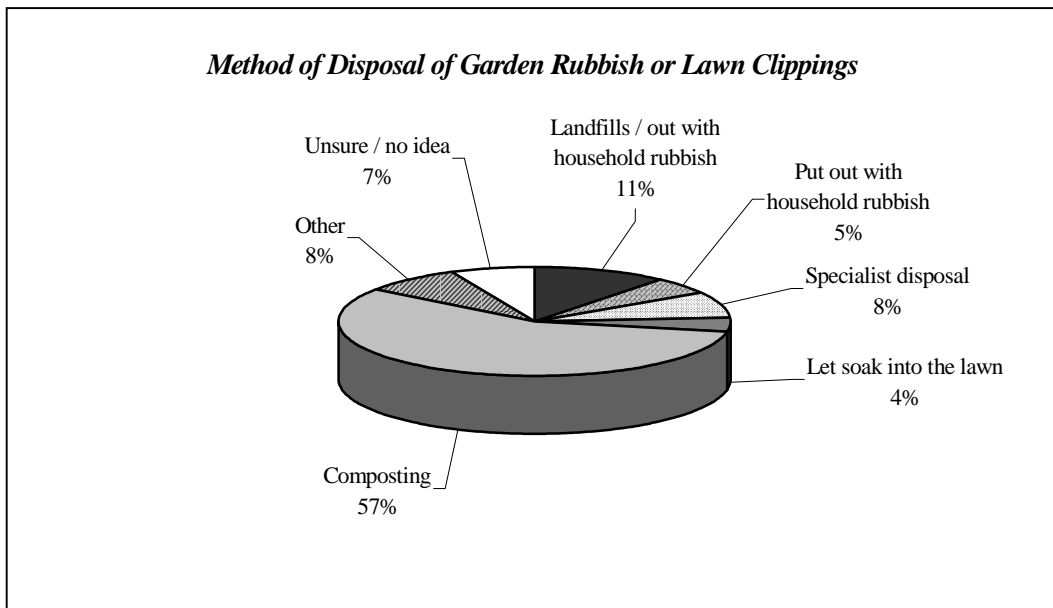
According to the respondents, in the last year or so:

- Two-thirds had disposed of garden rubbish or lawn clippings;
- About a half had washed their car;
- 28% had got rid of turps or water after painting;
- 13% had disposed of used oil from their car; and
- 8% had disposed of leftover home or garden chemicals.

The graphs that follow show what people who had not done any of these activities said they would do to dispose of the wastes, rather than what those who had done so, did do. This tells us more about what people think is the right thing to do and what they do not know. The comparison between the two groups is highlighted where it is meaningful.







Points to note from this are:

- Fertile ground continues to await our messages about stormwater. A significant number of people do not understand that what goes into the gutter ends up in the stream.
- More than a quarter of the population had undertaken some painting around the home in the previous year. Twenty percent of these put their paint washings into the stormwater system. Of the remaining three-quarters (the non-painters), about 20% would also follow this practice. Thirty percent of this latter group did not know where to dispose of these wastes.
- Of those who have disposed of turps and water from painting, it is pleasing to see 52% knew to do so through the sewer or onto the ground.
- Of those who have not washed their vehicle recently, a third said they would let the water run into the stormwater system and 20% were unsure how to dispose of the water. However, current practice does not offer much hope for the environment. Two thirds of those who wash their cars regularly now allow the water to run to the stormwater system.
- Most people get rid of their garden rubbish or lawn clippings by composting or taking it to a landfill (including putting it out with the rubbish). This is unlikely to change.
- Less than 10% of the sample had disposed of household or garden chemicals in the previous year. Forty percent of the remainder did not know how to dispose of these chemicals. Only 3% volunteered disposal by tipping down the sink or toilet.

6 **Environmental Attitudes**

The survey also investigated environmental attitudes, although this was not a prime focus and attitudes and beliefs are most usefully explored through qualitative research (e.g. focus groups, face-to-face questionnaires). Some of the results, however, are very interesting. The main reason for attempting to assess people's attitudes was to see if their attitude supported or could have caused their behaviour. The outcomes summarised here are just a part of what was found. This is explored more fully in the report but in summary we can say that those who professed a "greener" outlook were more likely to follow through with their actions.

6.1 **Economic Growth vs The Environment**

Given a choice, 66% of regional residents plumped for the position, 'protection of the environment should be given priority even at the risk of curbing economic growth'. Eighteen percent opted for 'economic growth should be given priority even if the environment suffers to some extent'. Twelve percent volunteered neither or both answers.

6.2 **Inconvenience to Help The Environment**

Three quarters of the respondents agreed that they would be "prepared to put up with some inconvenience to help the environment". Five percent disagreed. The highest level of strong agreement with this statement was in Kapiti (48%) and the lowest in Porirua (27%).

Younger respondents were less likely to strongly agree with the statement. Only 23% did so compared with 39% of 30 to 44 year olds, 40% of 45 to 59 year olds and 42% of 60 year olds plus.

6.3 **Prepared to Pay More to Help The Environment**

Across the Region, 64% said they would be prepared to pay "a little more" to help the environment. Under 30 year olds were again the least likely group to strongly agree that they were prepared to pay more to help the environment.

6.4 **Can't Afford to Help The Environment**

Thirty one percent of respondents said "I can't really afford to spend extra money to help the environment", while 38% agreed they could do so.

6.5 **Lack of Time to Help The Environment**

Forty one percent of regional residents agreed with the statement "lack of time prevents me from doing more to help the environment". Twenty-seven percent disagreed with the statement.

6.6 **The Power of One**

The Council's view that individuals can make a difference in their daily lives - the proposition that underlies our environmental education programmes - was given a vote of confidence when two thirds of the sample disagreed with the statement that "there's not much one person can do to help the environment". Only 20% thought that the individual cannot achieve much on his or her own.

7 **Knowledge and Interest**

7.1 **Knowledge of The Pollution Hotline**

Respondents were asked whether they had heard of the Pollution Hotline. Twelve percent said they were aware of it. By district this ranged from 5% in the Wairarapa to 17% in Lower Hutt. Amongst demographic groups there were higher levels of awareness in 30 to 60 year olds and amongst Wellington residents on middle incomes. Those who saw themselves as having a high degree of environmental commitment were more likely to be aware of the hotline (25%).

Of those who were aware of the hotline, 20% said they had used it.

7.2 **Interest in Receiving Information About The Environment**

We also asked some general questions about interest in information to inform the on-going development of our State of the Environment Monitoring Programme. Across the Region, 43% of people were very interested in receiving information about the quality of water at swimming beaches. Forty percent were very interested in information about water quality in streams and rivers. There was less interest in knowing about local air quality, but still a third were very interested and 40% fairly interested in this.

Twenty-six percent were very interested (and 42% fairly interested) in knowing more about "environmentally responsible businesses". This suggests there will be a market for this information and clear benefit for businesses undertaking the Council's *Take Charge* programme, which will include public notification by the Council of businesses in the programme.