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## **Waste management survey results: possible curbside changes**

### ***Background***

Following the endorsement of the WMMP Diversion recommendation:

- Consider curbside collection policy changes to increase diversion (e.g. bag limits, bi-weekly garbage collection, standardized Regional residential waste collection) and consider "user pay" options (e.g. bag tags)

Regional Council directed staff to conduct ongoing public awareness and more community engagement on the potential changes. In the fall of 2014, staff engaged in a number of activities, culminating in a survey, with the following goals:

- Inform residents of pending changes endorsed through WMMP;
- Educate residents about possible curbside changes and what they mean;
- Encourage public feedback on options endorsed through WMMP; and
- Use resident feedback to help develop curbside policy recommendations.

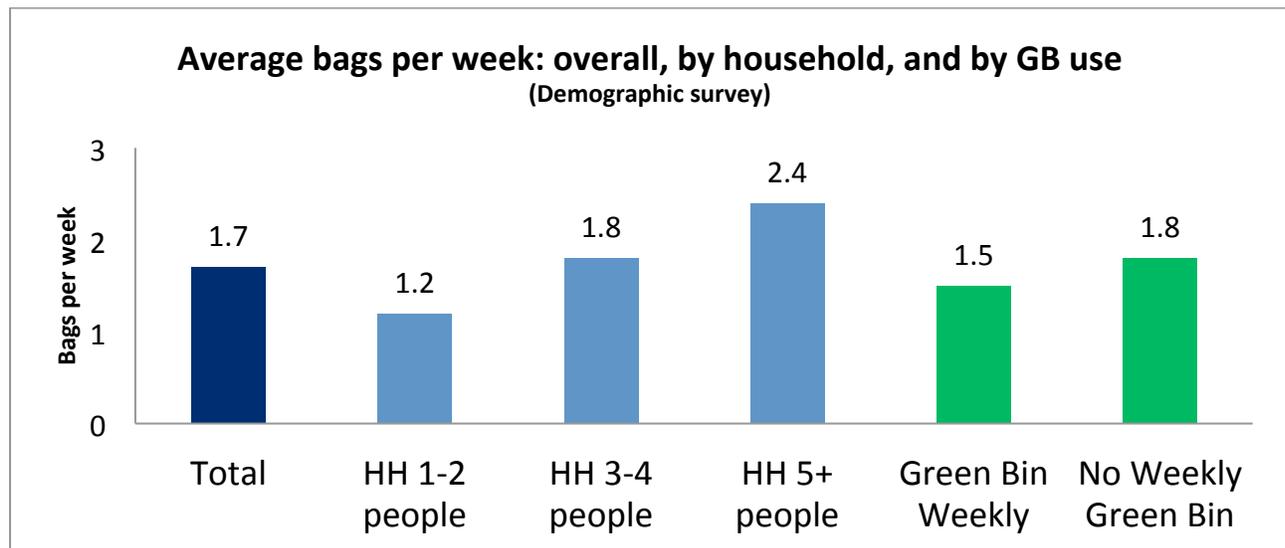
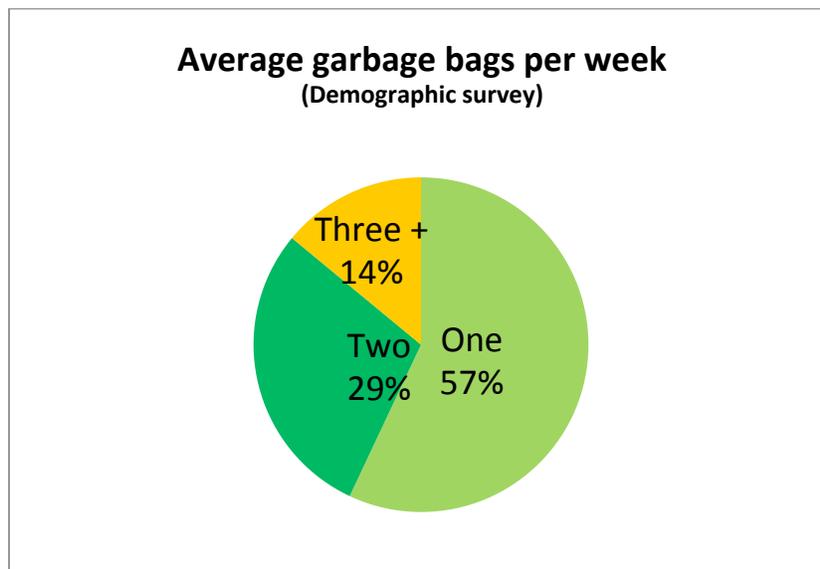
The survey was conducted in two ways:

1. Demographically representative (2011 Census) of 511 single family households across Waterloo Region ("demographic survey"). This group would serve as a control group, to balance concerns that a random survey is mainly completed by self-selected parties interested in waste management.
2. Open survey available online (could also complete via telephone through the call centre) promoted and randomly open to all residents of Waterloo Region; over 7,000 responses ("open survey").

While the open survey respondents provided valuable comment and input, they do skew slightly "greener" in their results. In order to prevent any bias, the results presented below are mainly based on the demographic survey, which is meant to be representative of the average citizen of Waterloo Region.

## Survey Results

### Garbage set out

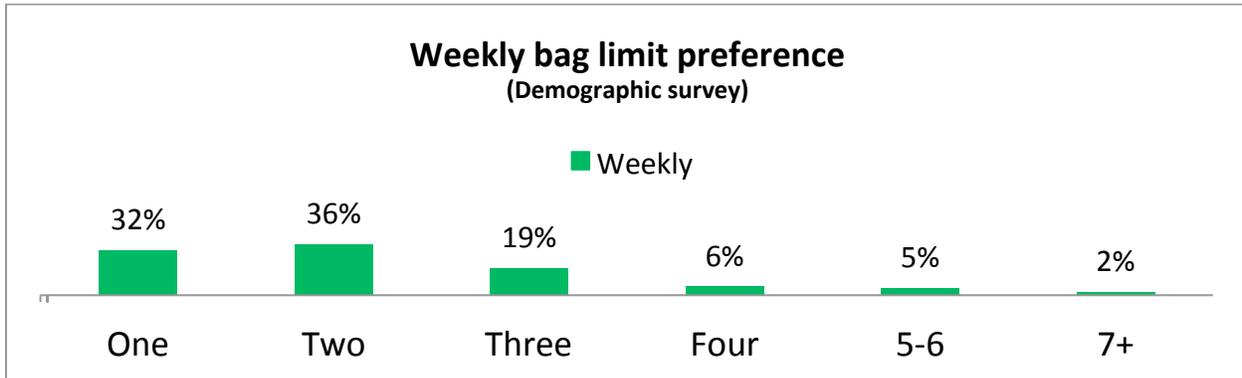


Current waste set out habits in Waterloo Region:

- Average bag set-out is 1.7
- Average set out for green bin users is 1.5, average for non green bin users is 1.8
- Larger households set out more, their average is 2.4 bags

- 86% of residents are putting out less than three bags per week, regardless of household size, green bin use, etc.
- 50% of residents use the green bin and 97% the blue box at least 1x per month

**Weekly bag limits**

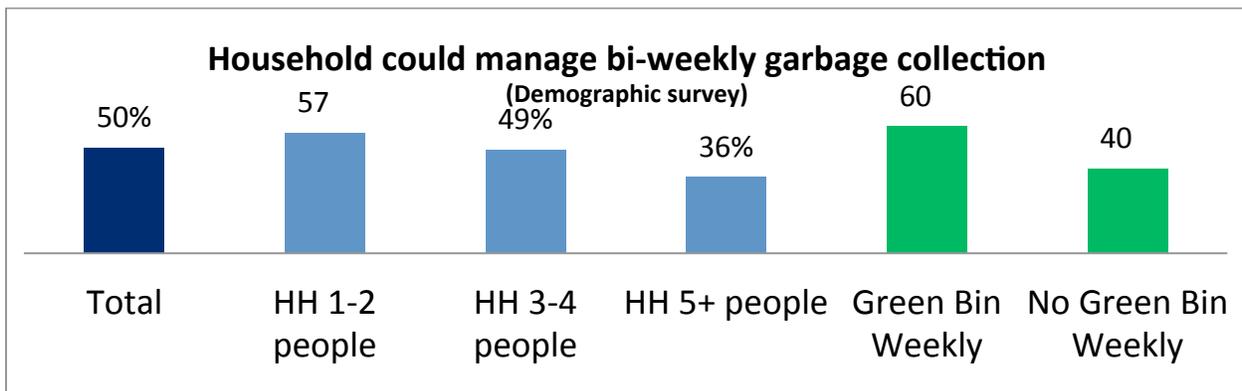


When asked what a reasonable bag limit would be for weekly collection, the majority of residents (68%) indicated one or two bags. The bag limit preferences are slightly more conservative than current set out rates. Even residents who regularly put out only 1 or 2 bags can likely think of occasions when they had additional waste, and may want to ensure they have capacity for that additional curbside set out.

Based on the self-reported set out rates, only 14% of residents are putting out 3 or more bags of waste. A 2-bag limit would serve 86% of residents, given current set-out habits and practices. It is worth noting that of 150,000 household served, 14% is still a significant number, representing about 21,000 households who would have to adjust their waste habits, and will likely require customer service calls requiring education, assistance and possibly enforcement.

**Bi-weekly collection**

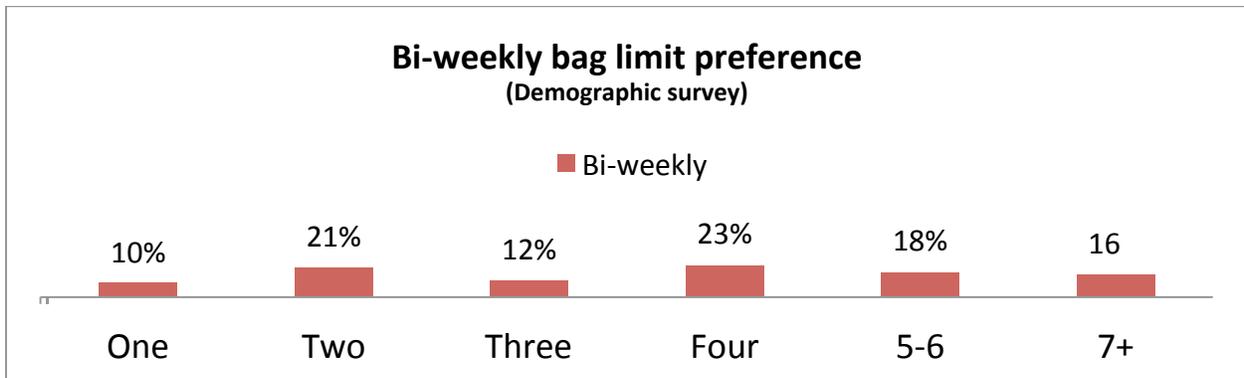
Residents were asked whether their household could manage bi-weekly collection:



Half of residents surveyed reported that their current practices would allow them to manage bi-weekly garbage collection. Support was highest among smaller households and green bin users, while larger households or those not using the green bin reported the largest potential impact from bi-weekly collection.

**Bi-weekly bag limits**

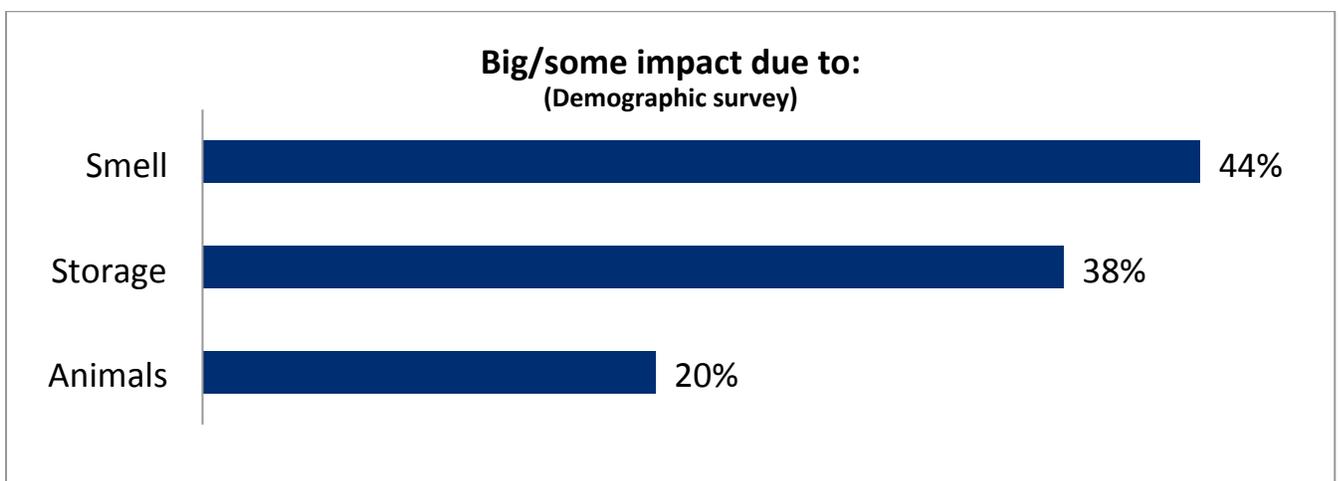
Residents were asked their thoughts on a reasonable bag limit for bi-weekly garbage collection:



The majority of residents (66%) would be served by a bi-weekly four bag limit, corresponding to current set-out rates of approximately two bags/week. Again, this reflects current waste habits of residents. Support for bi-weekly collection is strongest among green bin users.

**Concerns with bi-weekly collection**

Residents who reported that bi-weekly collection would have either a big or some impact on their household were asked why, and their concerns were recorded. The top three concerns mentioned were the same as those reported through the online survey (although the numbers varied slightly).

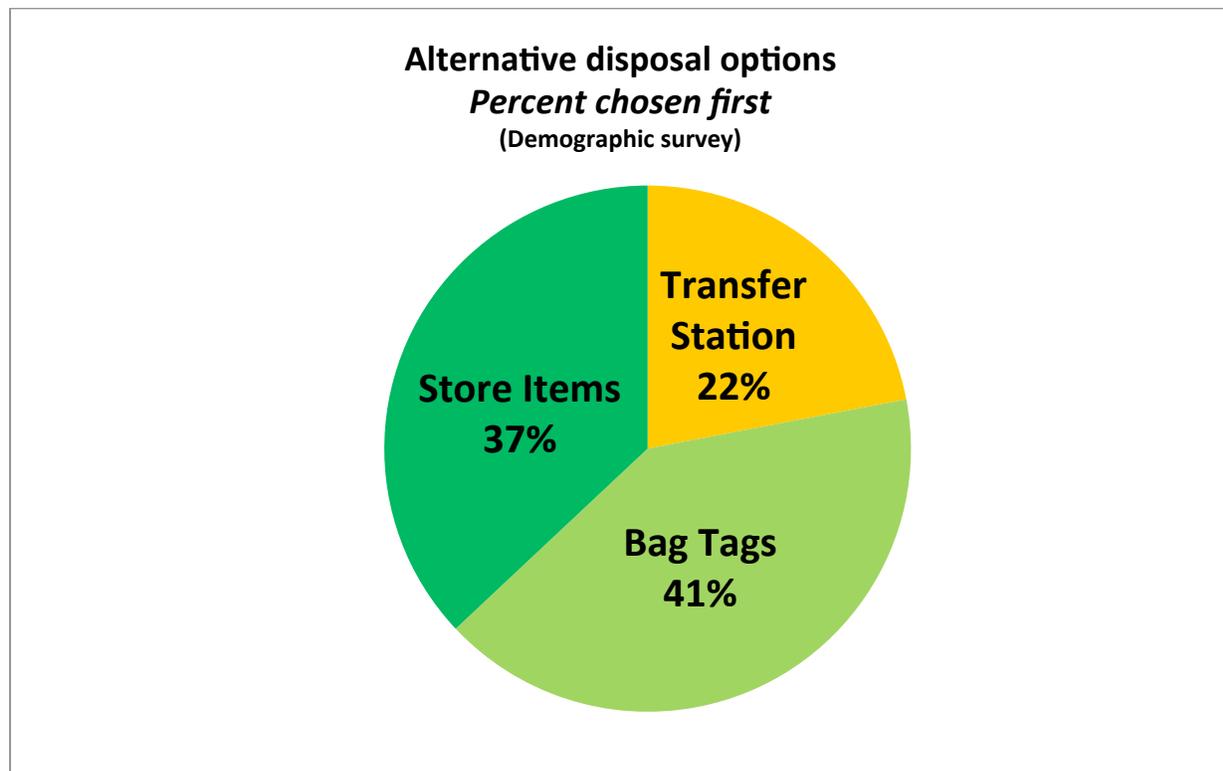


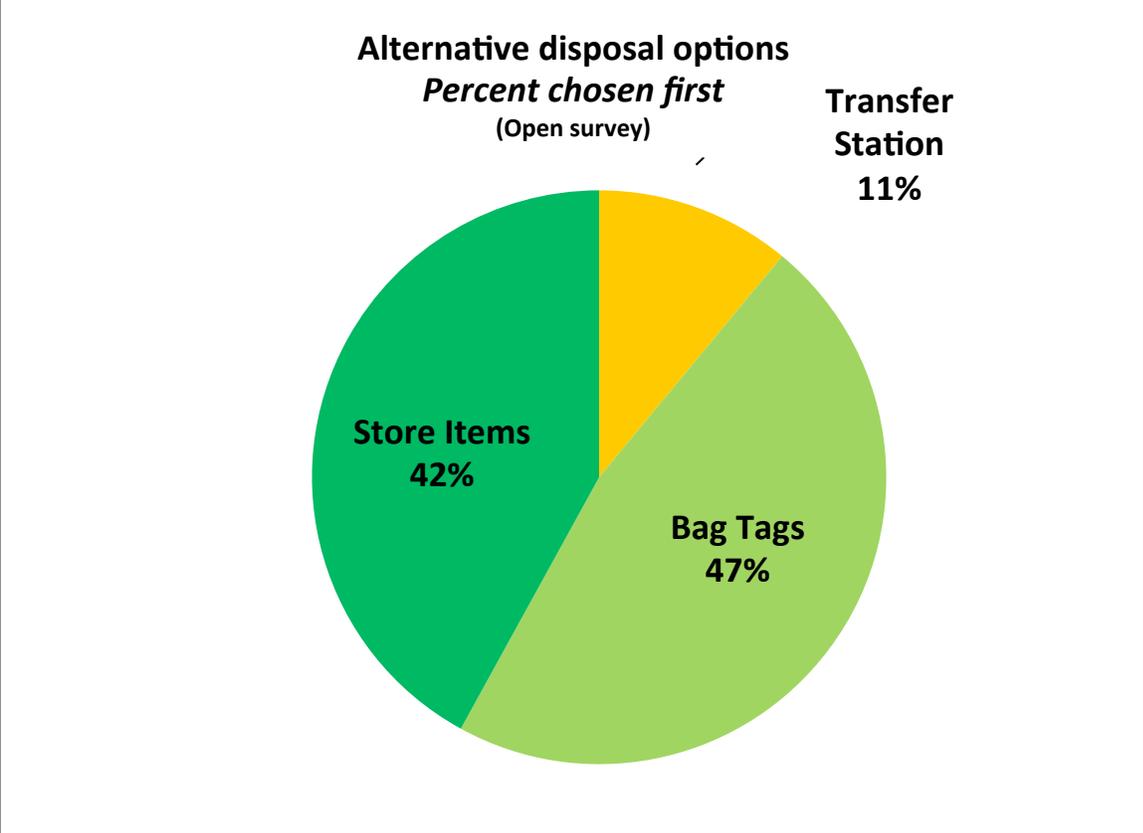
These issues, while all valid when it comes to handling waste, should be manageable for residents if they use the blue box and green bin weekly. It is apparent from write-in comments that many of these concerns have to do with storing garbage containing food waste among non green-bin users, and diapers/personal hygiene products among those who do use the green bin. These concerns can all be addressed through education.

The more engaged households reported being in diversion programs (i.e. blue box and green bin) the more likely they were to support bi-weekly collection.

**Extra waste**

Finally, residents were asked how, in the case of bag limits, they would prefer to handle having more waste than the limit allows. As the issue of what to do with extra waste beyond the bag limit affects all residents regardless of current practices, the results of the open survey are included here as well. Residents were given a choice of three options, all or some of which are in use by other municipalities: purchase a bag tag to allow for items to be collected curbside; store items and wait until a few times a year when bag limits are increased; or take items to the transfer station.





In the case of both surveys, residents closely preferred both bag tags and storing items until amnesty days over bringing items to the transfer station. These two options reflect both a user-pay (bag tag) and no-cost option, but overwhelmingly, the majority of respondents preferred the option that allowed for the convenience of curbside collection. Write-in comments also reflects many residents who do not drive, rely solely on public transit, or otherwise may not be able to get to a transfer station.

***Additional observations***

The majority of set out information reported by residents in the demographic survey is reflective of the set out rates obtained by staff through waste audits. Curbside waste audits show that the average household set out is 1.7 bags (1.3 bags for green bin users), and audits further show that 61% of households put out 1 bag, 23% put out 2 bags, and 16% put out 3 or more bags (compared to 57%, 29% and 14% respectively for the survey responses).

While self-reported green bin use through the survey is higher than that reported in audits (50% versus 19-35%) there could be several reasons for the discrepancy. Users of the survey were asked if they had set the green bin out at least one time in the last month; this occasional use of the green bin would account for lower participation rates in the weekly snapshot of the curbside audits. It may also be that survey respondents

were reluctant to report not using the green bin when asked directly as part of a waste survey.

Self-reported blue box participation rates are also slightly higher than those reported in audits (97% versus 82%) but the same reasons for discrepancy in green bin participation percentage may apply.

The concerns that residents have with bi-weekly collection (smell, storage, animals) can nearly all be addressed with proper green bin use. Outside of items that can be handled by the green bin, the items most likely to cause concern are diapers and personal hygiene products. According to various public health departments (including ROW Public Health) these items are safe to hold for two weeks if properly handled/stored.