

FAIRBANKS
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RECYCLING
COMMISSION
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Community Support Survey

Fairbanks North Star Borough Recycling Commission: Community Support Survey

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Methodology

The Fairbanks North Star Borough has been working on recycling for many years. The effort has ebbed and flowed during that time. The former Recycling Task Force morphed into the current Recycling Commission which has been active for a number of years. The Commission determined that in order to make a strategic plan and move forward in the best way possible, it needed to know the level of support for recycling in the Borough. The Commission contracted with Information Insights to conduct a statistically representative survey of Borough residents to gauge support for and participation in recycling by residents. This report includes the findings of that survey.

Telephone calls were made to call lists of randomly selected telephone numbers in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. Telephone numbers were obtained from the Polk Directory for the area. Calls took place Mondays through Thursdays, April 3rd to April 10th from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. During the five evenings of calling, approximately 2,092 calls were made resulting in 440 completed interviews. Of these, there were 104 (5.0%) invalid numbers or numbers without an eligible participant, 861 (41.2%) numbers where no one answered, 608 (29.1%) individuals who answered but chose not to participate in the survey, 79 (3.8%) people who asked to be called back at a different time but didn't complete the survey, and 440 (21.0%) completed surveys. Seven of our trained, experienced survey callers made calls.

According to the 2011 Alaska Department of Labor estimate, the Fairbanks North Star Borough has a population of 97,615. A sample of 440 completed surveys yields a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error of plus or minus 4.67.

The report is organized with written analysis of responses arranged by survey category following this section. The data tables contain a few percentages for those response categories where fewer than 20 people selected that response. Those numbers based on such a small number of responses should be used with caution.

Survey Results

DEMOGRAPHICS

The only eligibility criterion to participate was that respondents had to be at least 18 years old. We ask respondents about gender, age and income. The sample was quite evenly split between men and women; 47.7% of respondents were men and 52.3% were women.

Just under half the sample (46.1%) was between 40 and 59 years old. Nearly one-third (32.2%) of the sample was 50-59 years old, with 26.2% in the 60-69 year old range and 17.6% who were 70 years old or older. Respondents in the 40-49 year old range comprise 13.9% with those 18-39 years old (10.2%) rounding out the sample. With 90% of the sample being over 40 years old and younger people being more likely to participate in and support recycling, the supportive response is very encouraging.

Respondents were asked to identify the range that included their household income. This question had the highest refusal rate, with 9.5% of respondents declining to provide this information. Among those who did answer, less than one-fifth (16.9%) of respondents reported incomes of \$40,000 or less and just 4.4% total reported household income of less than \$20,000. Just over one-fifth (21.0%) reported income in the \$40,001 to \$60,000 and another 21.3% reported income in the \$60,001 to \$80,000 range, followed by 10.4% in the \$80,001 to \$100,000 bracket. Thirty-one percent reported household incomes of more than \$100,000.

AWARENESS OF RECYCLING

Respondents were asked, “Are you aware that there is currently recycling available in the Borough?” There was no difference between men and women in terms of their awareness of existing recycling. There were small differences between age groups. Those between 40 and 59 years old were the most likely to be aware of current recycling followed by those over 60 years old. Those under 40 years old were the least likely to be aware of current recycling, however the difference was not sizable. There was a sizable difference in awareness among those with a household income of less than \$40,000 of whom only 80.3% were aware of current recycling. Among those with higher incomes 92-94% of respondents were aware of current recycling options.

	Percent aware of existing recycling (n)
Overall	90.3 (393)
Gender	
Male	90.3 (186)
Female	90.2 (203)
Age	
18 – 39 years old	86.0 (37)
40 – 59 years old	91.8 (180)
60 years old or older	89.9 (169)
Income	
Less than \$40,000	80.3 (49)
\$40,001 to \$80,000	94.2 (146)
More than \$80,000	91.8 (135)

HOME RECYCLING PARTICIPATION AND BARRIERS

Respondents were asked, “Do you currently recycle any of the following at home?“, and then read of list of seven items as well as an ‘other’ category. Just under one-third (32.6%) of respondents reported that they recycled nothing at home. Paper, aluminum, plastic and cardboard were the most commonly recycled items in that order. Nearly half of respondents reported recycling paper while one quarter as many reported recycling the last place item—steel food cans. Among the ‘other’ items respondents listed the most common were clothing, compost, batteries, oil, and plastic grocery bags. Nearly one-fifth of respondents reported recycling electronics, although there was no follow up about the impact of fees on participation in that activity.

- Paper (newspaper or office) 49.9%
- Aluminum 47.0%
- Plastic 40.5%
- Cardboard or paperboard 36.5%
- Glass 27.1%
- Electronics 17.5%
- Steel food cans 12.5%
- Other 13.2%
 - batteries (6)
 - brass
 - burn cardboard
 - canning jars
 - car parts

- cell phones
- clothing (16)
- compost/kitchen scraps (8)
- copper (5)
- diapers
- egg cartons
- fluorescent light bulbs
- footwear (2)
- household goods
- metals
- oil (6)
- plastic grocery bags (6)
- rags
- toners
- used items at transfer site
- wood, sawdust

Women were more likely than men to recycled at least one item, 70.6% to 63.0%. The older respondents were the more likely they were to recycle. Nearly three-quarters (73.0%) of those over 60 recycled at least one item, while 65.8% of those between 40 and 59 years old recycled one item and just half of those under 40 years old did so. There was no clear trend between income and recycling. Those in the middle income range were the most likely to recycle.

	Percent recycling at least one item at home (n)
Overall	67.3 (296)
Gender	
Male	63.0 (131)
Female	70.6 (161)
Age	
18 – 39 years old	50.0 (22)
40 – 59 years old	65.8 (131)
60 years old or older	73.0 (138)
Income	
Less than \$40,000	66.1 (41)
\$40,001 to \$80,000	71.0 (110)
More than \$80,000	64.0 (96)

Differences between demographic groups were more pronounced when the analysis compared the number of items recycled by demographic groups. The table below shows the mean (the average) number of items recycled as well as the median (the number with half the values below and half above). The same ordering as above holds true here as well. Those with higher

percentages recycling at least one item (females, people over 60 years old, and those with household incomes between \$40,001 and \$80,000) were also the people recycling the highest number of items. The overall median was two items being recycled.

	Mean number of items recycled	Median number of items recycled
Overall	2.3	2.0
Gender		
Male	2.0	1.0
Female	2.6	2.0
Age		
18 – 39 years old	1.4	0.5
40 – 59 years old	2.4	2.0
60 years old or older	2.5	2.0
Income		
Less than \$40,000	2.0	1.5
\$40,001 to \$80,000	2.7	2.0
More than \$80,000	2.1	1.5

The one-third of respondents who reported that they did not recycle were asked, “What is the primary barrier that prevents you from recycling?” The largest barrier was not having time to drop it off followed by not having room to store it. Among those respondents who listed another reason, not knowing where to drop it off or not having much trash were listed as reasons for not recycling. Since only one-third of respondents answered this question, there were not enough cases to look at the figures by demographics without having very small numbers.

- | | |
|---|-------|
| Don't have time to drop it off | 31.7% |
| Don't have room to store it | 16.2% |
| Too much work to sort it out | 10.6% |
| Don't care | 7.0% |
| Don't think it makes a difference | 2.1% |
| Other | 32.4% |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burn it • Can already drop everything off at one place • Other priorities • Don't know where to go (4) • Not much trash (4) • Doesn't seem energy efficient • Work up north | |

WORKPLACE RECYCLING AVAILABILITY AND PARTICIPATION

Respondents were asked, “Is any recycling available at your workplace?” Only two people did not know, but 29.7% of respondents did not work. Among the 307 respondents who did work, the ability to recycle at work was nearly evenly split with 51.5% having recycling available at work and 48.5% who did not. This question asked about whether employees can recycle materials generated at work, not whether they may bring in recycling generated at home to be recycled at work. Since this question is not about individual choice, but what respondents’ employers had chosen to do, analysis by demographic categories is not applicable.

As with home recycling, paper, aluminum, plastic and cardboard were the most commonly recycled items in that order. Substantially higher percentages of respondents reported having the ability to recycle all four of those items at work versus those who recycled the items at home. As with home recycling, batteries and oil were items mentioned as ‘other’ items recycled.

Paper (newspaper or office)	69.8%
Aluminum	66.0%
Plastic	40.5%
Cardboard or paperboard	39.0%
Glass	22.6%
Electronics	13.8%
Steel food cans	11.3%
Other	5.8%
• anti-freeze	
• batteries (8)	
• cell phones	
• compost	
• cooking oil	
• copper (2)	
• fuel	
• ink cartridges (5)	
• metal	
• motor parts	
• oil (4)	
• scrap metal (2)	
• steel	

TRANSFER STATION RECYCLING

Respondents were asked, “If recycling of plastic, glass, paper and cardboard were available at the transfer stations and landfill would you recycle?” An overwhelming majority, 84.5% stated they would recycle if they could do so at the transfer stations and landfill. The same demographics who were more likely to report knowing about and currently recycling—females and those with household incomes between \$40,001 and \$80,000--also were more likely to

report that they would recycle if they could at the transfer stations and landfill. However, earlier questions had shown the 60 years old and older age group to be the strongest recyclers, but here the younger a respondent was the more likely they said they would recycle if it was available at transfer stations and the landfill.

This makes sense when remembering that the primary reason given by those who do not recycle was that they did not have time to drop it off. Since most households outside the city must visit the transfer stations already with their garbage, this would greatly improve the ease of recycling. With rising fuel costs, limiting the need to travel any additional distance to recycle is likely to enable more people to recycle.

	Percent who would recycle at the transfer stations and landfill (n)
Total	84.5 (355)
Gender	
Male	81.4 (162)
Female	87.1 (189)
Age	
18 – 39 years old	88.1 (37)
40 – 59 years old	87.8 (166)
60 years old or older	80.2 (146)
Income	
Less than \$40,000	82.1 (46)
\$40,001 to \$80,000	86.8 (131)
More than \$80,000	83.6 (122)

Respondents were also asked, “What are the top 3 items you’d like to see recycled at the transfer stations?” Instead of the top four items that people are currently recycling (plastic, paper, aluminum, and cardboard), aluminum was replaced with glass. This is likely due to the fact that aluminum already can be recycled at the transfer stations and that aluminum has a cash value. The figures below represent weighted values since respondents ranked their choices. Among ‘other’ items mentioned, batteries and oil continued to be the most frequently mentioned materials.

	Weighted %
Plastic	29.5%
Paper (newspaper or office)	20.5%
Glass	19.8%
Aluminum	13.9%
Cardboard or paperboard	6.8%
Electronics	5.1%

Steel food cans	4.4%
Other	13.0%
•	ashes
•	batteries (17)
•	cans (2)
•	CFL
•	Clothes (2)
•	compost, plants, soil (2)
•	cooking oil
•	coolant
•	copper
•	furniture
•	household items
•	mirrors
•	oil (11)
•	paint (2)
•	reusable
•	scrap metal (4)
•	styrofoam
•	textiles: blankets, jackets (2)
•	tin (3)
•	toxic cleaning fluid
•	wood, lumber (6)

SUPPORT FOR RECYCLING

Respondents were asked a number of questions about their support for a potential expansion of Borough recycling. Respondents were asked, “On a scale of one to ten, with ten being completely supportive, how supportive would you be of the Borough providing additional recycling for plastic, glass, paper and cardboard?” Sixty-two percent answered 10. The mean was 8.7 and the median was 10.0. As shown below, income made no difference in this result. There was a slight variation by age with the 40 to 59 year old age range being the most supportive. Gender showed the largest variation with the mean support among men being 8.0 (the lowest of any demographic group) and the mean support among women being 9.2 (the highest of any demographic group). The median figure for men was 9.5—the only median value not 10.0.

	Mean support for expanded Borough recycling	Median support for expanded Borough recycling
Overall	8.7	10.0
Gender		
Male	8.0	9.5
Female	9.2	10.0
Age		
18 – 39 years old	8.6	10.0
40 – 59 years old	8.8	10.0
60 years old or older	8.5	10.0
Income		
Less than \$40,000	8.6	10.0
\$40,001 to \$80,000	8.6	10.0
More than \$80,000	8.6	10.0

Even more than just pledging support for expanded Borough recycling in theory, the Commission wanted to know if recycling was important enough to residents that they would be willing to pay to support the program. Respondents were asked, “Are you willing to pay a fee in order to be able to recycle?” Twenty-six people stated that they did not know. Among the 413 people who answered, 60.3% (249) said they would pay a fee to recycle.

Those who indicated they would pay a fee were asked a follow-up question, “Juneau residents currently pay \$48 a year to support drop-off recycling. How much would you pay to support recycling at the transfer stations?” Over half (52.5%) of respondents said they would be willing to pay more than \$20 a year to support recycling at the transfer stations. This is 28.4% of all respondents who said they would be willing to pay more than \$20 annually for recycling.

\$1 to \$5 a year	4.6%
\$6 to \$10 a year	7.1%
\$11 to \$15 a year	4.2%
\$16 to \$20 a year	31.5%
More than \$20 a year	52.5%
Don’t know (23)	

As throughout the rest of the survey, women were more supportive than men with 54.7% willing to pay more than \$20 while only half of men were willing to pay more than \$20. Not surprisingly, those in the 40 to 59 year old range were the most likely to report a willingness to

pay more than \$20 annually. Younger people tend to have lower incomes while older people may be on a fixed income and reluctant to commit to another expense. Even with those issues, 45.0% of 18 to 39 year old were willing to pay more than \$20 to support recycling as were 44.6% of those 60 years old or older. Also not surprisingly, those with incomes of less than \$40,000 were less than half as likely as those with higher incomes to be willing to pay more than \$20 annually for recycling. Even among this lowest income group, nearly one-quarter of respondents were willing to pay more than \$20.

	Percent who would pay more than \$20 annually to support recycling at the transfer stations (n)
Total	84.5 (355)
Gender	
Male	50.0 (49)
Female	54.7 (76)
Age	
18 – 39 years old	45.0 (9)*
40 – 59 years old	60.0 (75)
60 years old or older	44.6 (41)
Income	
Less than \$40,000	24.0 (6)*
\$40,001 to \$80,000	55.3 (52)
More than \$80,000	55.4 (51)

* Number of cases is very small.

Conclusion

The majority of Borough residents are already recycling several items. Half of employers are recycling at the workplace. There is a great deal of support for the Borough to expand its recycling program. This support crosses demographic groups of gender, age and household income. Borough residents care enough about this issue that they expressed a willingness to pay for the opportunity to recycle at the transfer stations.