



Friends of the Earth
Les Ami(e)s de la Terre



Flushable Wipes in Canada
Survey Report



May 2019

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Methodology & Logistics

Overview

The following represents the results of the May 2019 omnibus telephone survey of N=2000 voting age Canadians. The survey was conducted by Oraclepoll Research Ltd. The results contained in this report are from those questions subscribed to by the Friends of the Earth.

Study Sample & Error Rates

A total of N=2000 Canadian residents, 18 years of age or older, were interviewed by telephone. Regional quotas were established, and the adjacent table provides a breakdown of the total sample by area or region.

The margin of error for this N=2000 sample is $\pm 2.2\%$ 19/20 times. Error rates vary and are larger for geographic and demographic sub-samples of the survey population. Results display in some tables and graphs may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

REGION	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Maritimes	140	7%
Ontario	780	39%
Quebec	480	24%
Manitoba / Saskatchewan	140	7%
Alberta	200	10%
BC	260	13%
Total	N=2000	100%

Survey Method

All surveys were conducted by telephone using live operators at the Oraclepoll call center facility using computer-assisted techniques of telephone interviewing (CATI) and random number selection (RDD). Twenty percent of interviews were monitored and the management of Oraclepoll Research Limited supervised 100%. The dual sample frame random database was inclusive of landline and cellular telephone numbers.

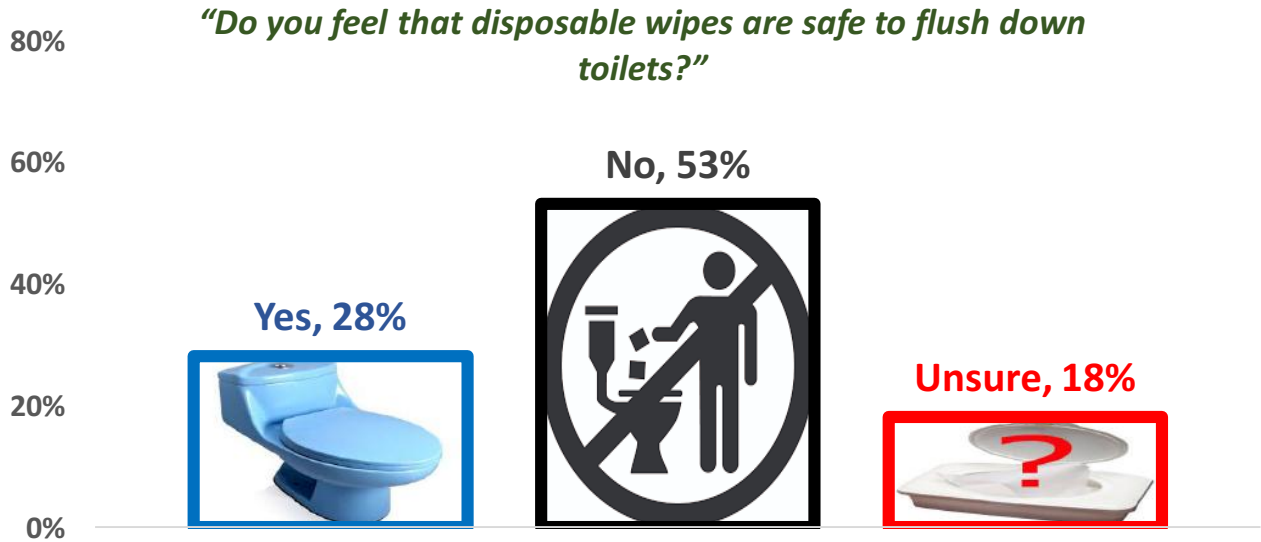
Logistics

Surveys were completed between the days of May 1st and May 9th, 2019. Initial calls were made between the hours of 6:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. within each respective time zone. Additional calls and call-backs of no-answers were made on a daily rotating basis (9 a.m. to 9 p.m.) up to five times. In addition, telephone interview appointments were attempted with those respondents unable to complete the survey at the time of contact.

Results – “Safe to Flush”

Respondents were first read the following statement that described “flushable wipes” and outlined the debate over their safety with respect to being flushed and treated in municipal waste water plants. They were then asked their opinion on whether it is safe to flush these wipes down toilets.

“There are single-use products on the market that contain plastic or synthetic fibers and are labelled as flushable wipes by their manufacturers, including cloths used for personal hygiene, baby care, make-up removal as well as dog poop bags. There is a debate over whether these products can be safely flushed based on whether they break down quickly enough to not clog sewage pipes and equipment in municipal waste water treatment plants.”



Slightly more than half or 53% feel that disposable wipes are not safe to flush, compared to less than three in ten or 28% that said they are safe while almost two in ten or 18% were unsure.

British Columbians were the most likely to say no or unsafe, followed by Quebecers, while residents of the Maritimes or almost half consider wipes to be safe to flush. A lack of awareness of the issue as evidenced by elevated responses of unsure or don't know was highest in Ontario, Alberta and the Provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

	YES	NO	UNSURE
Maritimes	49%	41%	10%
Ontario	29%	48%	23%
Quebec	27%	59%	15%
Man. / Sask.	26%	54%	20%
Alberta	30%	49%	21%
BC	19%	68%	13%



	YES	NO	UNSURE
18-34	20%	71%	8%
35-54	24%	61%	15%
55+	39%	30%	30%

The youngest respondents 18-34 (71%), followed by those in the mid-aged 35-54 cohort (61%) were most likely to feel that disposable wipes are unsafe. This compares to only 30% of Canadians 55+, while a significant number of the oldest surveyed or 30% were unsure or did not know.

Those with post-secondary education and especially university degrees were the most inclined to answer no or that wipes are unsafe to flush.



	YES	NO	UNSURE
High school or less	38%	39%	22%
Some post secondary	28%	44%	28%
Grad. college / technical	29%	53%	18%
Graduated university	25%	61%	14%



	YES	NO	UNSURE
Under \$30,000	18%	64%	18%
\$30,000- \$59,999	22%	62%	16%
\$60,000- \$89,999	35%	40%	24%
\$90,000+	22%	61%	17%

The main variance when it comes to combined household income is in the mid-income cohort of \$60-\$89,999 where there were more that said wipes are safe (35%) and were unsure (24%). As a result, the number of this group that answered no or unsafe was the lowest at 40%.

An almost equal number of males and females answered no, but more females said yes or safe, while a higher number of males were unsure.



	YES	NO	UNSURE
Male	25%	54%	21%
Female	32%	52%	16%

Results – Trust to Provide Information

Next, respondents ranked in order of preference four potential sources of information in terms of them being most credible in providing information about disposable wipes. They were instructed that one was the most and four the least credible. Results displayed below are the mean scores – which exclude the N=80 or 4% that answered do not know.

“Who do you most trust to give you credible information about whether it is safe or not to flush these products down your toilet? I am going to read you four options and would like you to rank them in order of trust starting with one being the most credible, down to the fourth or least.”

MEAN SCORE RATINGS 1-MOST & 4-LEAST CREDIBLE



Scientists or waste water engineers

1.5

1-Most credible	61%
2	30%
3	8%
4-Least credible	1%

Scientists or engineers are most credible with a mean score of 1.5 and 91% that ranked them a “1” (61%) or “2” (30%).



Municipal governments

2.1

1-Most credible	22%
2	46%
3	30%
4-Least credible	2%

Next highest ranked are municipal governments with a 2.1 mean. Most or 76% accorded a “2” (46%) or “3” (30%).



Environmental groups

2.7

1-Most credible	11%
2	17%
3	60%
4-Least credible	12%

Environmental groups score in the middle between governments and manufacturers at 2.7, with the highest rating of “3” (60%) while only 12% ranked it a “4”.



The manufacturers of flushable products

3.7

1-Most credible	5%
2	8%
3	2%
4-Least credible	85%

Seen as least credible with a mean of 3.7 are manufacturers as an 85% majority provided them with a “4” or least credible rating.

Results by Question

Introductory Statement

“There are single-use products on the market that contain plastic or synthetic fibers and are labelled as flushable wipes by their manufacturers, including cloths used for personal hygiene, baby care, make-up removal as well as dog poop bags. There is a debate over whether these products can be safely flushed based on whether they break down quickly enough to not clog sewage pipes and equipment in municipal waste water treatment plants.”

Q1. “Do you feel that disposable wipes are safe to flush down toilets?”			
		N	%
	Yes	568	28.4
	No	1064	53.2
	Unsure	368	18.4
	Total	N=2000	100%

Q2. “Who do you most trust to give you credible information about whether it is safe or not to flush these products down your toilet? I am going to read you four options and would like you to rank them in order of trust starting with one being the most credible, down to the fourth or least.”

Descriptive Statistics (1-most – 4-least credible)	
	Mean
Scientists or waste water engineers	1.49
Municipal governments	2.11
Environmental groups	2.73
The manufacturers of flushable products	3.68

The manufacturers of flushable products				
		N	Total %	% Excluding Unsure
	1-Most credible	94	4.7	4.9
	2	149	7.5	7.8
	3	44	2.2	2.3
	4-Least credible	1633	81.7	85.1
	Unsure	80	4.0	
Total		N=2000	100%	100%

Municipal governments				
		N	Total %	% Excluding Unsure
	1-Most credible	429	21.5	22.3
	2	883	44.2	46.0
	3	572	28.6	29.8
	4-Least credible	36	1.8	1.9
	Unsure	80	4.0	
Total		N=2000	100%	100%

Scientists or waste water engineers				
		N	Total %	% Excluding Unsure
	1-Most credible	1176	58.8	61.3
	2	567	28.4	29.5
	3	156	7.8	8.1
	4-Least credible	21	1.1	1.1
	Unsure	80	4.0	
Total		N=2000	100%	100%

Environmental groups				
		N	Total %	% Excluding Unsure
	1-Most credible	219	11.0	11.4
	2	321	16.1	16.7
	3	1148	57.4	59.8
	4-Least credible	232	11.6	12.1
	Unsure	80	4.0	
Total		N=2000	100%	100%