

# THE CARTON COUNCIL NATIONAL RECYCLING RESEARCH 2024 FINDINGS



RECYCLABLES



People • Service • Environment  
WASTE SYSTEMS, INC.



Hill & Knowlton



# Project Background

- + The goal was to identify key knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about food and beverage carton recycling among the American public
- + Research was designed to guide continued activity and outreach regarding carton recycling
- + The survey included questions from our 2020, and 2022 surveys to highlight potential trends in awareness, attitudes and recycling behaviors
- + Questions were fielded in October 2020, August 2022, and March 2024

## 2024 Methodology

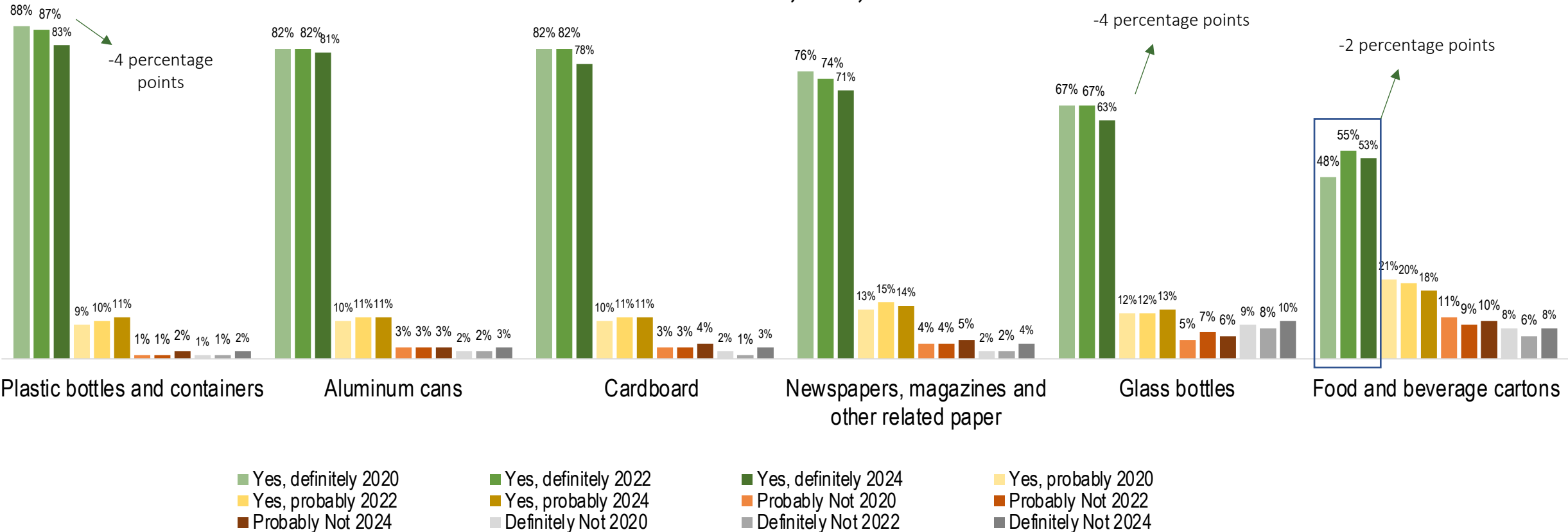
- + A 10-15-minute online survey
- + 8,925 interviews were conducted with those who reported access to curbside recycling programs in their area
- + Recruitment was conducted for those in the 39 states with 30% or greater access to food and beverage carton recycling as reported and monitored by Resource Recycling Systems

# Key Observations

- + There are slight decreases across the board in beliefs about materials' acceptance in recycling programs.
- + Reported recycling behavior also experienced slight decreases from 2022.
- + The gap is continuing to close between carton recycling, and aluminum cans and plastic bottles. While cartons are recycled at a lower rate than plastic bottles and aluminum cans, the gap continues to decrease year-over-year.
- + Overall, there was slight decrease in recycling prioritization, with several attributes showing drops in awareness and recycling behavior over the last measurement period.
- + Uncertainty about cartons recyclability remains the primary barrier to not recycling, but the gap is closing as "uncertainty" dropped 8 percentage points from 2022.
- + Product packaging and local websites remain the top sources for learning about recycling information.

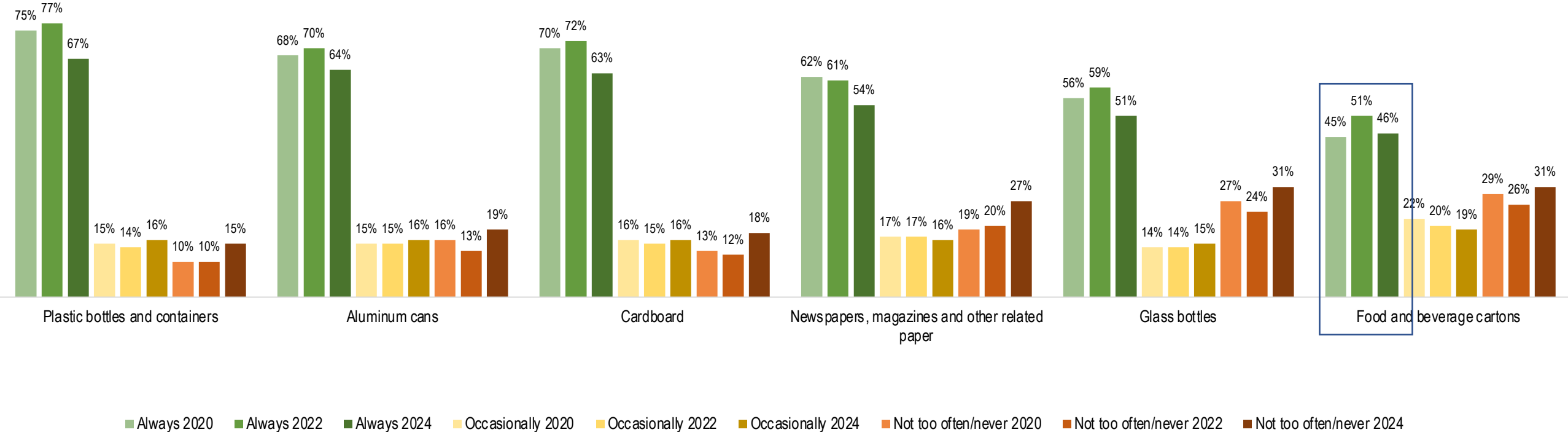
# There is a slight decrease from 2022 in confidence that food and beverage cartons are definitely accepted for recycling, a trend seen along with all other materials.

For each of the types of materials, please indicate if you believe these items are accepted in your community for curbside recycling?  
2020, 2022, 2024



# All recyclable materials saw decreases in recycling frequency from 2022 to 2024.

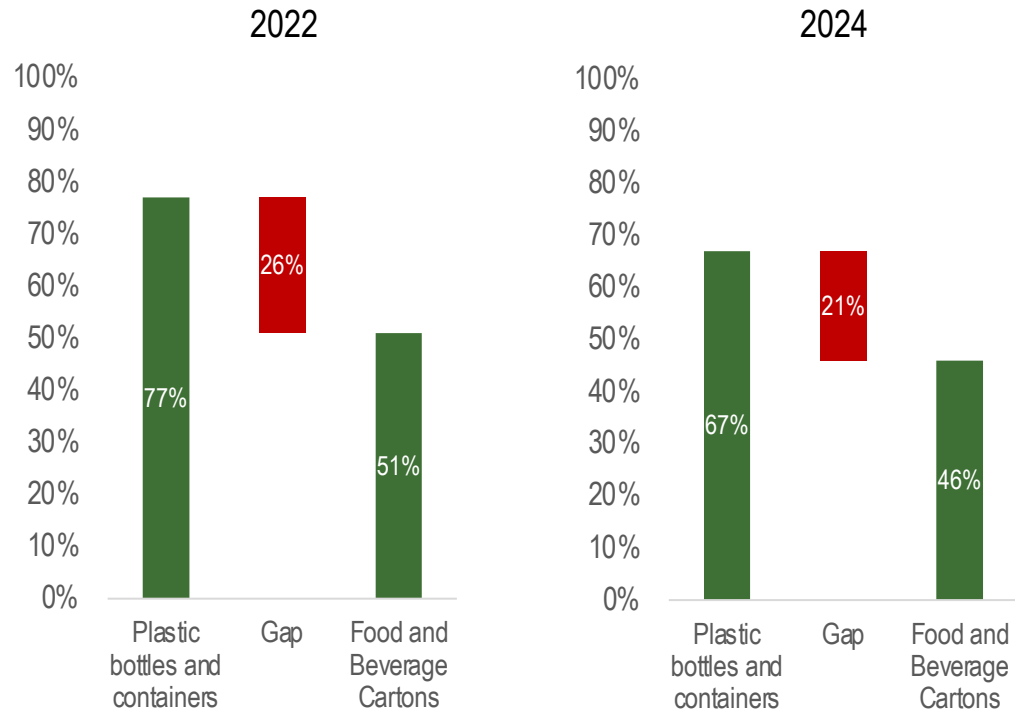
For each of the types of materials, please indicate if you recycle them through your local curbside recycling program and if so, how frequently:



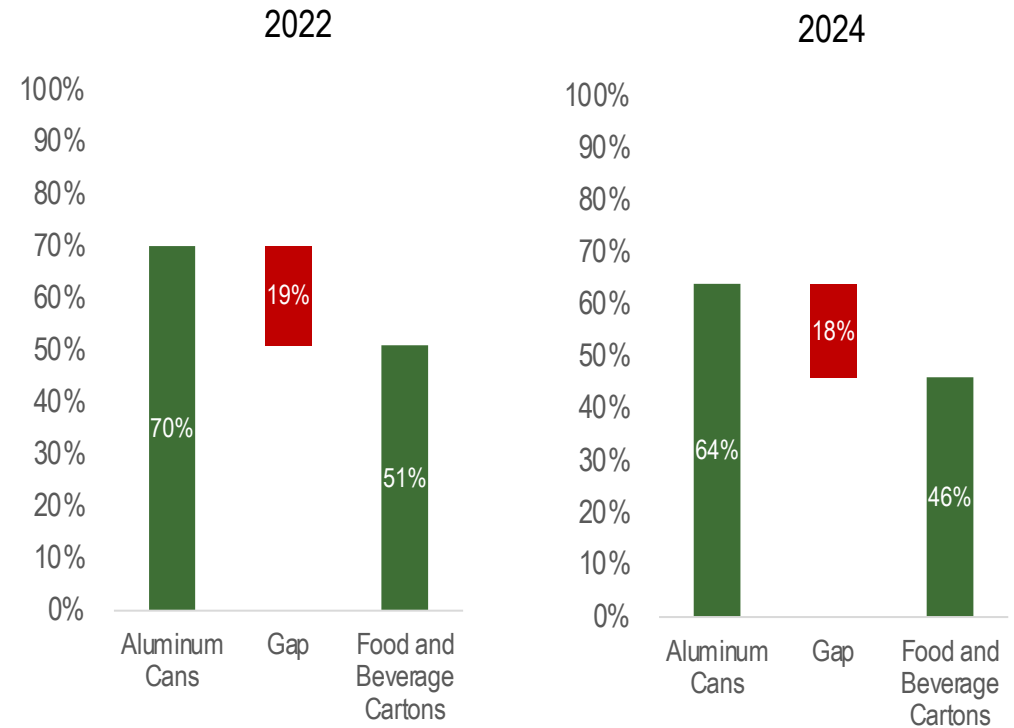
# Carton recycling is closing the gap on both plastic bottles and aluminum cans from 2022 to 2024.

For each of the types of materials, please indicate if you recycle them through your local curbside recycling program and if so, how frequently:  
(Always)

## Plastic Bottles and Containers

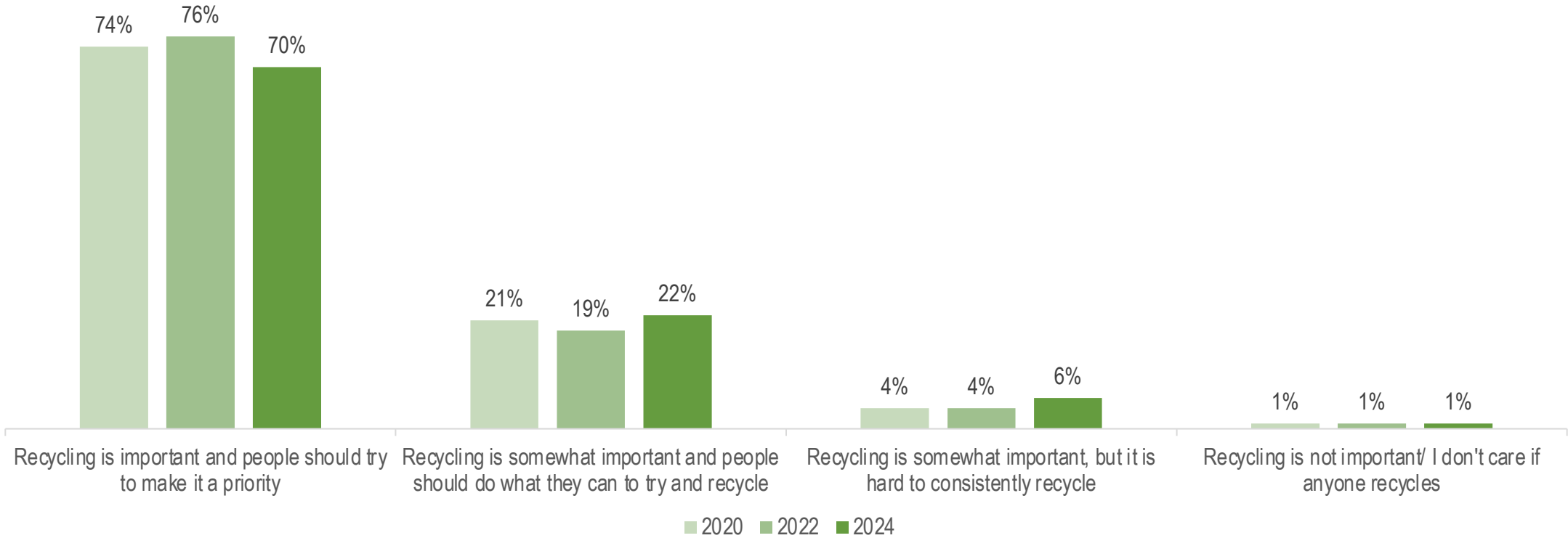


## Aluminum Cans



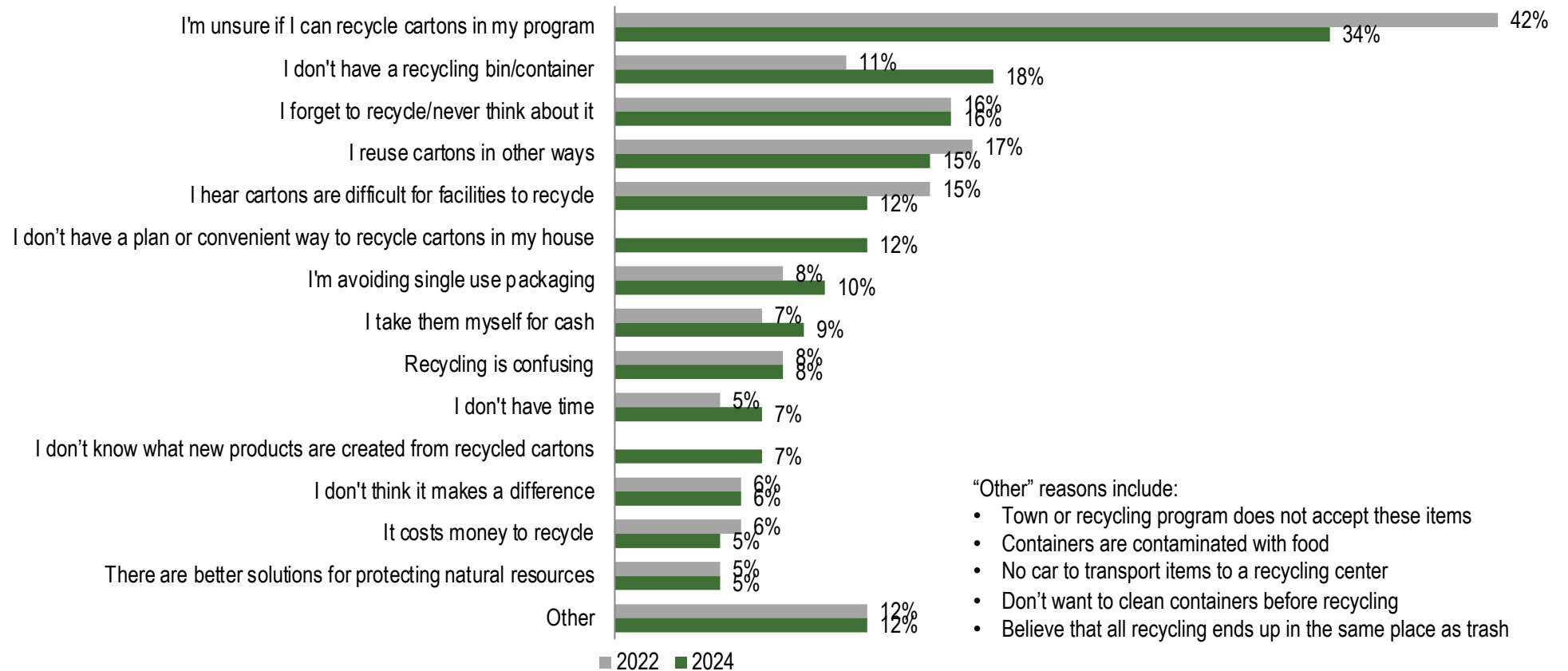
# Consumers report a slight drop-off in recycling as a priority but increases in “somewhat important” and difficulty consistently recycling.

From the following list of statements, which statement comes closest to describing your views on recycling?



# Uncertainty about carton recycling remains the primary barrier, but has decreased from 2022

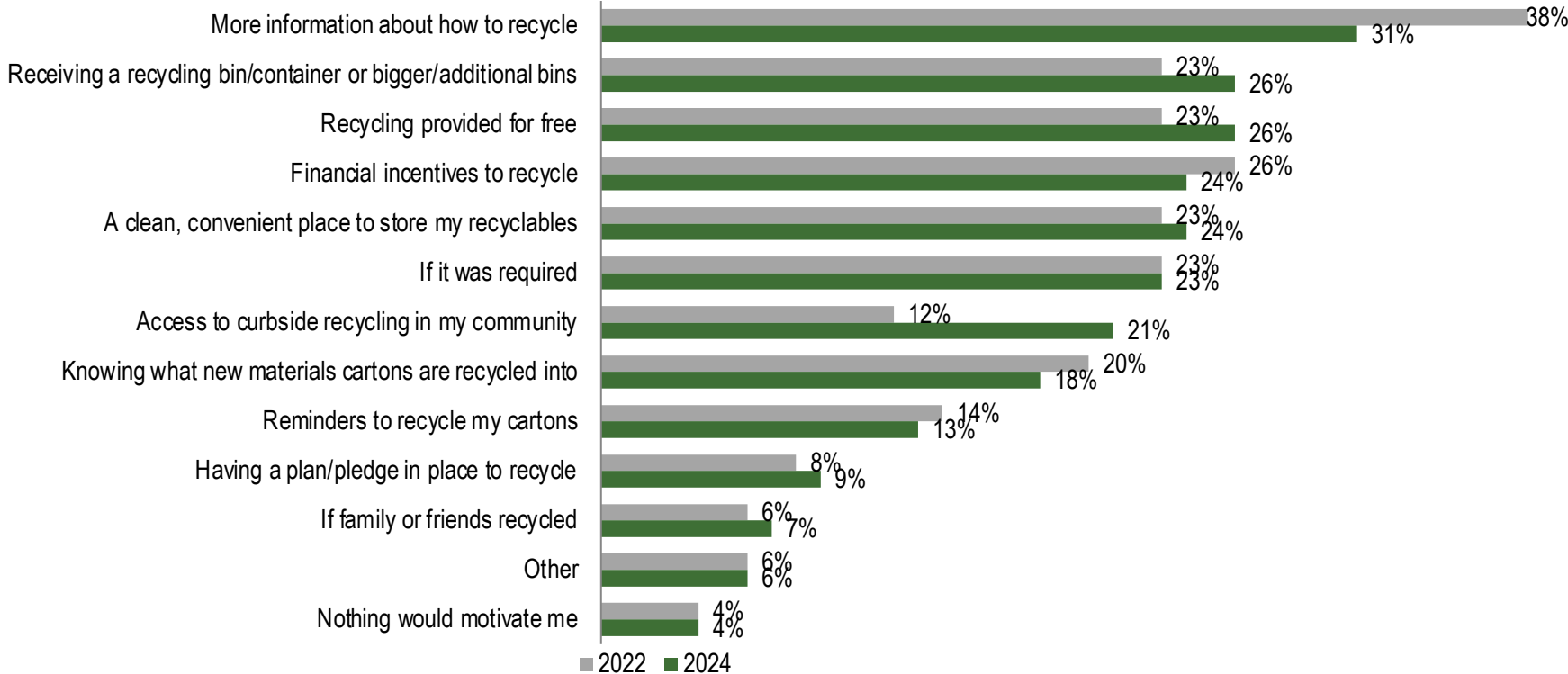
You indicated earlier in the survey that you do not regularly recycle your food and beverage cartons. Why don't you recycle these items?  
(2022 - 2024 data - asked among those that rarely or never recycle their cartons)





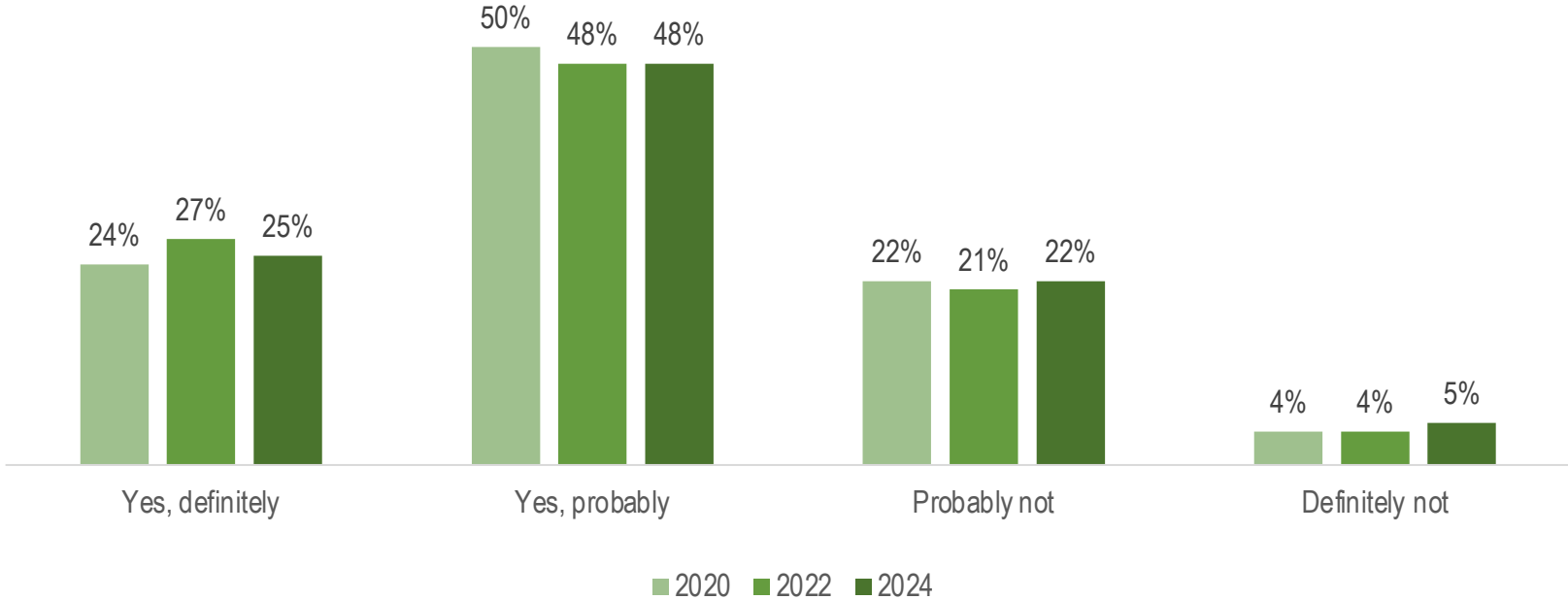
# More information is the most effective way to encourage food and beverage cartons recycling.

Which of the following would make you more likely to regularly recycle your food and beverage cartons?  
(2022 - 2024 data - asked among those that rarely or never recycle their cartons)



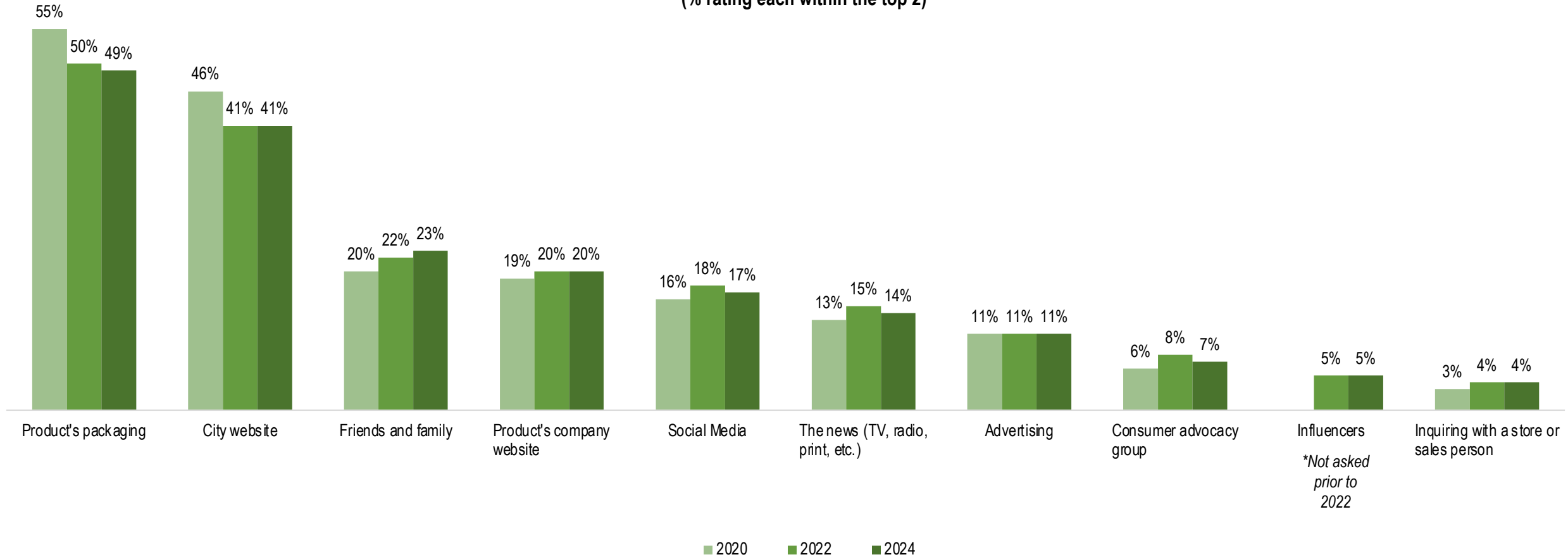
# A lack of recycling symbols results in a strong feeling that the package is not recyclable, consistent with previous years.

While shopping, if you noticed that a product's package did not have a symbol or language indicating it is recyclable, would you assume that package was NOT recyclable?



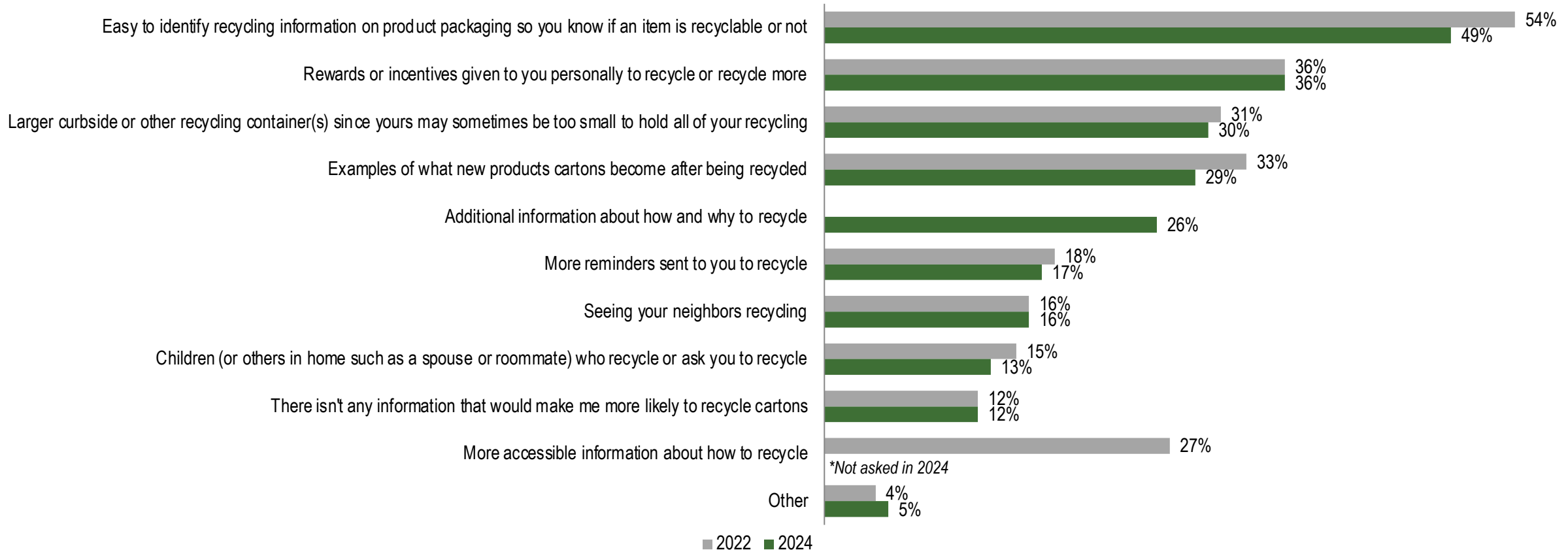
# Product packaging and city websites remain top sources for recycling information.

From the following list of choices, which TWO would you turn to first to learn about the recyclability of a package?  
(% rating each within the top 2)



# Recycling information on product packaging continues to be an important factor in increasing likelihood of carton recycling

Is there any information that might increase the likelihood that you would recycle cartons?  
(2022 - 2024 data - asked among those that recycle their cartons)



# Demographic Breakdown:

Those most likely to believe cartons are accepted recyclables are younger (<54), higher educated, higher income and reside in the Northeast with kids at home, consistent with 2022 results.

Please indicate if you believe food and beverage cartons are accepted in your community for curbside recycling.  
(% responding yes, definitely or yes, probably)

TOTAL	GENDER		AGE				EDUCATION		
Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55-74	75+	High school grad or less	Some college	College+
71%	71%	71%	73%	73%	67%	68%	70%	70%	73%

INCOME			RACE		KIDS AT HOME		REGION			
<\$50k	\$50k-\$100K	\$100k+	White	Non-White	No	Yes	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
68%	72%	76%	71%	71%	70%	74%	74%	71%	70%	70%

**Green font** indicates a significantly higher percentage compared to other segment(s) within that demographic.



For questions about the research, please contact:

**Colby Vogt**

[Colby.vogt@hillandknowlton.com](mailto:Colby.vogt@hillandknowlton.com)

**Hill & Knowlton**



# Appendix



Hill & Knowlton

RECYCLABLES



People • Service • Environment  
WASTE SYSTEMS, INC.



# Demographic sampling is consistent with previous years

- This study was conducted using non-probability (opt-in) online consumer panels. As such, the precision of online polls is measured using a credibility interval (also known as a margin of error). In this case, the survey has a credibility interval of plus or minus 1.8%, meaning we can say that the real population value is within 1.8 percentage points above or below each data point we have in the report. Within each state (n=200), the credibility interval would be 6.9%.

*What this really means: small differences in percentage are significant.*