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How green are you? Where do you live?

By KRISTINE OWRAM, CP

Canadians are recycling and composting more than ever before, but whether they compost their coffee grounds or recycle their milk cartons seems to have a lot to do with where they live, Statistics Canada says.

While cities like Montreal and Calgary struggle to divert even a third of their waste from landfills, others expect to be recycling or re-using up to 90% of their solid waste within a few years.

In Markham, council has been working for years to find ways to divert as much waste as possible from landfills. Through a combination of public education and pilot projects, they've managed to reduce the amount of waste headed to the dump to just 30%.

Regional councillor Jack Heath, chairman of Markham's waste diversion committee, said the solution was simple: Picking up recyclable and organic waste -- blue boxes and green bins - - twice as often as garbage.

"If you want to throw your banana peels and your dirty diapers in the garbage, you can hang onto them for two weeks," Heath said. "Or, you can throw them in the green bin and we'll collect them every week."

Heath said all it took to reach 70% diversion -- a rate Toronto, which sits at about 42%, has set as a "long-term goal" -- was a little political will.

"People had some trepidation, but after a few weeks they said, 'This isn't that difficult,' " he said. "It was the strong will of council to solve the problem that basically changed the system, and that's how we got to where we are."

Statistics Canada's Households and the Environment Survey, released Friday, found the proportion of household waste recycled by Canadians increased from 19% in 2000 to 27% in 2004. The survey also found that 27% of Canadian households composted in 2006, up from 23% in 1994.