

CANADIANS' HABITS AND PREFERENCES

in Relation to Labelling of Products for Information on Chemicals and Sustainability

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Executive Summary
AUGUST 2022

Prepared for Environment and Climate Change Canada

Supplier Name: Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Contract Award Date: December 17, 2021

Delivery Date: August 2022

Contract Amount (incl. HST): \$44,770.60

Contract #: K2A00-220919/001/CY

POR Number: 067-21

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Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.



En-4-481/2-2022E-PDF
978-0-660-45239-5
EC22057

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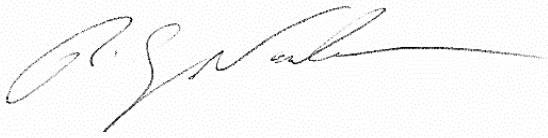
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Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rick Nadeau", is written over a light gray, textured rectangular background. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Rick Nadeau, President
Quorus Consulting Group Inc.

Executive summary

Background and research objectives

There is growing concern from Canadians about the health and environmental impacts the household products they buy and use, including the impacts posed by chemical ingredients. While many consumers look at product labels for information on risks, they often have difficulty obtaining information on ingredients of concern. Increasing the disclosure of chemical ingredients used in products has been identified as a Government of Canada priority.

A better understanding of the perspectives of consumers on product labelling generally, and on the issues of access to chemical composition, and broader sustainability information on products will help to inform policies and decisions that account for consumer concerns and views.

Environment and Climate Change Canada, in collaboration with Health Canada, commissioned a national survey of Canadian consumers to better understand consumer concerns, needs, preferences, biases, and habits in relation to product labels, including the types of information most important to consumers and label types (for example, physical or digital).

Methodology

Report findings are based on a non-probability sample, as respondents volunteered to participate in online surveys using an online panel. The data have been weighted to reflect the demographic composition of the Canadian general population. As the data collected does not represent the overall population of Canadians, the term *Canadians* in the document represents all Canadian respondents. As the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation in the online panel, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. The equivalent margin of error for a probability study would be +/-3.1%. All research work was conducted in accordance with the professional standards established by the Government of Canada Public Opinion Research Standards.

Data collection occurred between April 29 and May 8, 2022. A total of 1,000 surveys were completed using a stratified random sampling approach within the online panel of Canadian households. For this study, quotas by province were established to generate sufficient data regionally for robust analysis. Data were monitored to aim for a 50/50 split between the two sexes in each province and ensure that no specific age cohort was under-represented. In addition, there was 4% of Indigenous participation including First Nations, Métis and Inuit.

Summary of research findings

A. Environmental and health concerns

Concern for potential impact

Most Canadian respondents are concerned (very, moderately, or somewhat) about the potential environmental impacts (93%) and the potential health impacts (94%) of the products they buy and use. Those who show lower levels of concern feel products sold in Canada are safe to use (37%).

Determining whether a product is safe

General trust for product labels

Most Canadians agree that product labels contain helpful information (82%), and enough information to make healthy choices for themselves or their family (61%). Fewer Canadians agree that product labels are clear and easy to understand (48%), can be trusted (43%), and provide enough information to make environmentally friendly choices (40%).

Safe for one's health

For products to be considered safe for one's health, Canadians generally want to see that products are tested by a regulatory authority (60%), manufacturers (45%) and third-party organizations (42%) and would prefer products with healthy and safe ingredients. Canadians value products that are not associated with long-term health effects (58%) and do not present any immediate health hazards (50%). For some respondents, products should be free of specific chemicals or ingredients of concerns and other ingredients of concern (49%), be made from natural (39%) and recognizable ingredients (30%), and be made with as few ingredients as possible (27%).

Environmentally friendly

For products to be considered environmentally friendly, half of Canadians believe that they should be recyclable in local recycling facilities (55%), not produce unnecessary waste (54%), and be compostable in local composting facilities (50%).

Making informed purchasing decisions

When purchasing different products, Canadians feel that the top three most important environmental considerations are what the product is made of (45%), whether it has substances that are potentially hazardous to the environment (41%), and whether the product can be recycled or composted (37%).

Familiarity with ecolabels

One third of Canadians are at least somewhat familiar with ecolabels placed on product packaging (35%), with only a handful who are very familiar (4%) or moderately familiar (11%). One third are not at all familiar with these labels (36%) while just one quarter claim to be slightly familiar (26%). Canadians who are very concerned about the potential environmental impacts and potential human health impacts of the products they use are much more likely to be very or moderately familiar with ecolabels (28% and 26%, respectively).

Credibility of ecolabels

Usage of ecolabels tends to mirror the level of familiarity when making purchase decisions. While the great majority of Canadians do not always use ecolabels for informed purchases, at least half give them some credibility (58%).

B. Purchasing household products

General considerations

Overall, four in ten Canadians indicate that they consider the human health and safety impact when purchasing a product (40%) while three in ten consider the environmental impact (32%). The top three factors when considering a product purchase are cost (76%), quality or durability (63%), and functionality (53%). Notably, a list of product ingredients is top of mind for those looking for useful product information (56%). Half or more of respondents found it useful for the product to list ingredients hazardous to human health (59%), chemicals or ingredients of concern (53%), or ingredients that are known to be harmful to the environment (50%).

Discouragement when purchasing products

Confusing or unclear product information (53%), missing important product information (49%), and difficult-to-read product labels (48%) were all cited as reasons to discourage respondents from purchasing products.

Having product information available exclusively online was a discouraging factor for nearly one third of respondents (31%). Conversely, more than one fifth were discouraged by a lack of available product information online (21%). Of those who mentioned they may have been discouraged from purchasing a product for which the product information was available only online (31%), most lack access to that information or are more likely to have unreliable data plans or trust issues. No cell phone data (22%), no knowledge of QR codes (20%), or unreliable internet access (12%), no cell phone/computer (8%) are all cited as reasons to be discouraged.

Choosing products with ecolabels

The top product categories where the presence of an ecolabel makes a positive difference in purchasing decision are cleaning products (68%), paints and dyes (62%), cosmetics and personal care (60%), food and beverages (57%), and baby and children's products (57%).

Impact of product ingredients

Information on product ingredients is important to over two thirds of Canadians (68%), and more than three quarters of these feel that the information on the ingredient composition of a product would influence their decision to purchase that product (76%).

C. Labelling information considerations

Recyclability and composability

Canadians are also in tune with symbols in relation to recycling and composting, as more than four-in-five individuals reported being influenced by the presence of these symbols on labels when disposing of a product or its package after using it (84%).

Consistency of product labels

Nearly three quarters of individuals indicate that it is important to make product labels harmonized to ensure consistency from product to product (71%). This will make it easier to compare products (24%) and to understand different product ingredients (17%).

Chronic health effects

Including information on the chronic health effects of products on product labels is also important to most Canadians (79%), with the large majority saying it should be mandatory to do so (75%).

Household chemical products

Most Canadians always or often read labelling or package information on how to use household chemical products (72%) and the directions on how to use these products safely (71%). The brand or product name (68%) along with the health hazard information (66%) are also read with high levels of frequency. The majority of respondents also read directions for environmentally safe disposal of the product (64%) and how to store the product safely (64%). Respondents indicated also considering labelling information such as the list of product ingredients (52%) and any ecolabels included on the packaging (45%).

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