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The Omaha Effort:

Findings From A Citizen Survey

The Omaha Effort: Findings From A Citizen Survey

**Conducted by the
Center for Public Affairs Research
College of Public Affairs and Community Service
University of Nebraska at Omaha**

for the

**Department of Public Works
City of Omaha**

August 1991



The Omaha Effort:

Findings From A Citizen Survey

This report summarizes findings from a July 1991 telephone survey. The survey was conducted for the City of Omaha Department of Public Works and focused on Omaha's current recycling program, The Omaha Effort, as well as citizen attitudes toward recycling in general.

The Department of Public Works identified four major areas which guided the development of the survey instrument. They were:

1. Awareness of The Omaha Effort;
2. Participation in The Omaha Effort;
3. Attitudes toward The Omaha Effort;
4. Participation in recycling.

Survey Methodology

To conduct the telephone survey, 8,000 randomly generated phone numbers were purchased from Metromail Corporation. This list of phone numbers was further randomized by dropping the last digit of the selected phone numbers and substituting a random number. Doing this permitted the survey to reach households with unlisted phone numbers.

The telephone survey was conducted by professional interviewers employed by an Omaha survey research firm. Interviews were only completed with adult residents of houses or condominiums/townhomes within the corporate limits of the City of Omaha. Residents of apartments and mobile homes/trailers were excluded since they are not currently served by the city's Blue Bag Program. All interviews were completed during July 9-13, 1991.

A total of 300 interviews were completed. With a sample size of 300, it is possible to state with 95 percent confidence that the sample results are within +/- 5.5 percent of what would have been found had all adults in the City of Omaha been interviewed.

A copy of the survey instrument is contained in attachment A. Frequencies for the survey questions are contained in attachment B; open-ended responses are provided in attachment C.

Respondent Profile

- A majority (44.4 percent) of the respondents are between 25 and 44 years of age. Over one-fifth of the respondents are over 65 years of age.
- Over 65 percent of the respondents are females.
- Almost 98 percent of the respondents live in single family units, while 2.3 percent live in condominiums/townhomes.

Key Findings

Awareness and Understanding of the Omaha Effort

- Majority (97.0 percent) of the respondents are aware of The Omaha Effort.
- Majority of the respondents learned about the program through the electronic and print media.
- Over 22 percent of the respondents understand The Omaha Effort as a program that involves separating recyclables. Another 20.5 percent report that The Omaha Effort is a program designed to save the environment, trees, and land. Over 16 percent say The Omaha Effort involves recycling glass, metal, and some plastic.

Participation in The Omaha Effort

- Almost 65 percent of all respondents report participating in The Omaha Effort at some point.
- Over half (55.0 percent) of all respondents say they have participated in The Omaha Effort in the last four weeks.
- Of all respondents, 44.0 percent report participating in The Omaha Effort during the week preceding the survey.
- Respondents who said they participated in The Omaha Effort, but had not participated in the last four weeks, were asked if they had stopped participating. A total of 21 respondents (7.0 percent) were in this group. Causes for ceasing to participate include “political indecisiveness and trouble with the first Omaha Effort.”
- A majority (51.0 percent) of all respondents report participating in the Blue Bag Program.
- Almost three-fourths (73.4 percent) of the participants in The Omaha Effort say they use blue bags. Another 15.0 percent use blue bags and drop-off locations; 6.4 percent use drop off locations only; and the remaining 5.2 percent use neither. Reasons for not using blue bags include “cost of bags,” needing reassurance that the materials in the blue bags are actually being recycled, and “thought it was discontinued.”
- Almost three-fifths of The Omaha Effort participants report setting out a blue bag every week, while 28.8 percent do so once every two weeks.
- Almost 39 percent of the respondents report recycling through The Omaha Effort, 34.4 percent recycle through other means, and 27.1 percent recycle using both means.

Participation in Recycling

- Among various recyclable items, paper is the most recycled item. Over 75 percent of all respondents report recycling paper. Almost 75 percent of the respondents recycle aluminum. This is followed by recycling of tin cans (44.3 percent), plastic (41.5 percent), and glass (41.0 percent). Just over one-third (33.7 percent) of the respondents knowingly recycle lawn waste, while another 30.0 percent recycle it unknowingly (e.g., leave it on the lawn, composting, etc. but do not think of these actions as recycling).
- Over 30 percent of the respondents leave their grass clippings on the lawn, 19.1 percent engage in backyard composting, 3.7 percent both leave grass clippings on the lawn and engage in backyard composting. Over 30 percent of the respondents bag their grass clippings and leave it for collection.
- The most frequently cited reason for recycling specific items is “concern for the natural environment.” Other reasons include “it’s the right thing to do,” convenience/habit on the part of the respondent (15.1 percent), and because The Omaha Effort makes it convenient to participate (12.0 percent).
- The most frequently cited reason for not recycling specific items is “have very little to recycle” (26.8 percent); “it’s too much of an effort” (19.1 percent); insufficient information on how to recycle (14.1 percent); and complacency on the part of the people (12.3 percent).

Attitudes Toward The Omaha Effort

- The most liked aspect of The Omaha Effort is that “it is a good idea” (23.1 percent). Another 16.0 percent of the respondents report appreciation of the fact that environmental issues are being addressed. According to 15.3 percent of the respondents, curbside pickup is the most liked aspect about The Omaha Effort, and 10.8 percent like the fact that the city is making an effort to do something.
- Over 16 percent of the respondents report there is nothing they dislike about the program. 14.4 percent of the respondents dislike the cost involved in participating and 9.0 percent of the respondents report they dislike the political indecisiveness and problems that have accompanied the program. Over 8 percent of the respondents feel that both blue bags and regular bags should not be picked up by the same truck. Another 8.3 percent report that participation requires too much effort on the part of residents.

Attachment A
Survey Instrument

NC – Not Codeable
 NA – Not Applicable
 DK – Don't Know
 RF – Refuse
 NR – Non Response

Interviewer Name: _____ Date: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Time taken: _____

Introduction

Hello, my name is _____. The City of Omaha in conjunction with the Center for Public Affairs Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha is conducting a survey of attitudes towards recycling. Your answers are extremely valuable to us. Would you tell me if I have reached _____ [REPEAT TELEPHONE NUMBER]. Your number has been randomly selected.

According to our research procedure I need to speak to a person who lives in the incorporated city limits of Omaha and is 18 years old or more.

Screening Instrument

1. Do you live in the incorporated city limits of Omaha? (CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE)

Yes No Don't Know/Refused

IF YES, CONTINUE ← Yes

IF NO OR DON'T KNOW/REFUSED, SAY
 Thank you, but we are only surveying people living in the City of Omaha.

2. Are you 18 years old or more? (CIRCLE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE)

Yes No Don't Know/Refused

IF YES, CONTINUE ← Yes

IF NO OR DON'T KNOW/REFUSED, SAY
 Thank you, but we are only surveying people 18 years old or more.

3. Do you live in a house, an apartment, a condominium/townhouse, a trailer, or something else?

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| House | 1 |
| Apartment | 2 |
| Condominium/townhouse | 3 |
| Trailer | 4 |
| Something else | 5 |
| DK/RF | 9 |

GO TO SURVEY

The Omaha Effort

Let me assure you that your responses are confidential and anonymous. The interview will take about 10 minutes. Feel free to ask questions at any time. Okay?

1. First of all, are you aware of The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

- Yes 1 CONTINUE
- No 2 GO TO Q 14
- Dk/Rf 9

2. Have you ever participated in The Omaha Effort?

- Yes 1
- No 2 SEE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW.
- Dk/Rf 3

IF YES TO Q 1 AND NO TO Q 2, ASK Q 3, 4, 5, 6, THEN GO TO Q 14.
IF YES TO Q 1 AND YES TO Q 2, CONTINUE.

3. How did you learn about the recycling program? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE)

4. What is your understanding of what The Omaha Effort Recycling Program is? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE)

5. What do you like most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE).

6. What do you dislike the most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE).

7. Did you participate during the last 4 weeks in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

- Yes 1 CONTINUE
- No 2 GO TO Q 9
- Dk/Rf 3

8. Did you participate during the last week in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

- Yes 1 GO TO Q 11
- No 2 CONTINUE
- Dk/Rf 3

9. Have you stopped participating in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

Yes 1 → ASK Q 10, THEN SKIP TO Q 14

No 2 GO TO Q 11

Dk/Rf 3

10. Why are you no longer participating in the Omaha Effort Recycling Program? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE).

11. Are you using blue bags, drop off locations, both, or neither?

Blue bag 1 → GO TO Q 13

Drop off 2 → ASK 12, THEN GO TO Q 14

Both 3 → GO TO Q 13

Neither 4 → ASK Q 12, THEN GO TO Q 14

Dk/Rf 9 → GO TO Q 14

12. Why do you not use blue bags? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE).

13. How often do you set out a blue bag? Do you set one out every week, once in two weeks, once in three weeks, once a month, less often. IF RESPONSE IS "LESS OFTEN", OBTAIN EXACT FREQUENCY OF PARTICIPATION AND WRITE RESPONSE IN "e".

a. Every week 1

b. Once in two weeks 2

c. Once in three weeks 3

d. Once a month 4

e. Less often _____ 5

f. Dk/Rf 9

14. Do you recycle any of the the following items?

| | Yes | | No | | Dk/Rf |
|-------------------------|-----|----------|----|----------|-------|
| a. Glass | 1 | | 2 | | 9 |
| b. Paper | 1 | → IF YES | 2 | → IF NO | 9 |
| c. Aluminum | 1 | TO ANY | 2 | TO ANY | 9 |
| d. Tin cans | 1 | ASK Q 16 | 2 | ASK Q 15 | 9 |
| e. Plastic | 1 | | 2 | | 9 |
| f. Lawn waste | 1 | | 2 | | 9 |

15. Why don't you recycle the items you mentioned? (WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE).

16. Why do you recycle the items you mentioned? (DO NOT READ. WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE)

- Concern for the natural environment 01
- Concern for the economy 02
- Concern for human health 03
- Concern for natural resources 04
- Receive money for recycling 05
- Many people I know do it 06
- It is the right thing to do 07
- It is convenient 08
- DK/RF 99

16a. Do you recycle through the Omaha Effort, or other means or both? (PROBE IF THEY SAY "OTHER MEANS" OR "BOTH." WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE)

- Omaha Effort 01
- Other means 02
- Both 03
- DK/RF 99

17. What do you do with your grass clippings? (DO NOT READ LIST. WRITE IN EXACT RESPONSE)

- Leave on the lawn 01
- Backyard composting 02
- Bag for collection 03
- Both leave on lawn and bag for collection 04
- Both leave on lawn and backyard composting 05

18. What was your age on your last birthday? (WRITE IN AGE) _____

19. What is your zip code? 68___ __ __

That concludes the survey. Thank you very much for your help. Goodbye.

20. RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT: [DO NOT ASK]

- MALE 1
- FEMALE 2
- COULD NOT DETERMINE 3

Attachment B
Survey Frequencies

The Omaha Effort: Survey Frequencies

1. First of all, are you aware of The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | .97.0 |
| No | 3.0 |
| Total responses | = 298 |

2. Have you ever participated in The Omaha Effort?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | .66.9 |
| No | .33.1 |
| Total responses | = 290 |

3. How did you learn about the recycling program?

See Attachment C

4. What is your understanding of what The Omaha Effort Recycling Program is?

See Attachment C

5. What do you like most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

See Attachment C

6. What do you dislike the most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

See Attachment C

7. Did you participate during the last 4 weeks in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | .85.1 |
| No | .14.9 |
| Total responses | = 194 |

8. Did you participate during the last week in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | .79.5 |
| No | .20.5 |
| Total responses | = 166 |

9. Have you stopped participating in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Yes | .33.9 |
| No | .66.1 |
| Total responses | = 62 |

10. Why are you no longer participating in the Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

See Attachment C

11. Are you using blue bags, drop off locations, both, or neither?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Blue bag | 73.4 |
| Drop off | 6.4 |
| Both | 15.0 |
| Neither | 5.2 |
| Total responses | = 173 |

12. Why do you not use blue bags?

See Attachment C

13. How often do you set out a blue bag? Do you set one out every week, once in two weeks, once in three weeks, once a month, less often.

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|----------------------------------|----------------|
| a. Every week | 58.8 |
| b. Once in two weeks | 28.8 |
| c. Once in three weeks | 6.5 |
| d. Once a month | 5.2 |
| e. Less often | 0.7 |
| Total responses | = 153 |

14. Do you recycle any of the the following items?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Yes (Percent)</u> | <u>No (Percent)</u> | <u>Other* (Percent)</u> | <u>Total Responses</u> |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. Glass | 41.0 | 59.0 | 0.0 | 300 |
| b. Paper | 75.3 | 24.7 | 0.0 | 299 |
| c. Aluminum | 74.7 | 25.3 | 0.0 | 300 |
| d. Tin cans | 44.3 | 55.7 | 0.0 | 300 |
| e. Plastic | 41.5 | 58.3 | 0.0 | 299 |
| f. Lawn waste | 33.7 | 36.4 | 30.0 | 297 |

*30% of respondents who recycle lawn waste do not realize that they are recycling.

15. Why don't you recycle the items you mentioned?

See Attachment C

16. Why do you recycle the items you mentioned?

See Attachment C

16a. Do you recycle through the Omaha Effort, or other means or both?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Omaha Effort | 38.5 |
| Other means | 34.4 |
| Both | 27.1 |
| Total responses | = 262 |

17. What do you do with your grass clippings?

See Attachment C

18. What was your age on your last birthday?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| 18-24 | 7.4 |
| 25-34 | 22.9 |
| 35-44 | 21.5 |
| 45-54 | 14.8 |
| 55-64 | 12.5 |
| 65+ | 20.9 |
| Total responses | = 297 |

19. What is your zip code?

See Attachment C

20. RECORD SEX OF RESPONDENT:

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Male | 34.7 |
| Female | 65.3 |
| Total responses | = 300 |

3. Do you live in a house, an apartment, a condominium/townhouse, a trailer, or something else?

| <u>Response</u> | <u>Percent</u> |
|---------------------------------|----------------|
| House | 97.7 |
| Condominium/townhouse | 2.3 |
| Total responses | = 300 |

Attachment C
Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions

The Omaha Effort: Responses to Open-Ended Survey Questions

3. How did you learn about the recycling program?

| | Percent |
|--|---------|
| Radio/television/newspaper/media | 89.6 |
| Word of mouth | 3.5 |
| Newspaper/media/word of mouth | 4.5 |
| Mail and media | 1.0 |
| Media and grocery store ads | 0.7 |
| Through the city program | 0.7 |
| Number of responses | 289 |

4. What is your understanding of what The Omaha Effort Recycling Program is?

| | Primary Response (%) |
|--|----------------------------|
| To save land, environment, trees | 20.2 |
| Separating items by type of material and bagging in different colored bags | 22.7 |
| Not enough information | 3.5 |
| Blue Bags, etc. | 3.9 |
| To recycle glass, metal and some plastic | 16.7 |
| To save money | 1.1 |
| It is voluntary | 0.7 |
| A disorganized "mess" | 6.7 |
| To cut down on landfill garbage | 15.6 |
| To encourage Omahans to recycle a lot | 5.7 |
| Not picking up certain items anymore | 0.4 |
| Keep city clean | 0.4 |
| Saving containers, materials | 0.4 |
| Other | 2.1 |
| Number of responses | 282 |

5. What do you like most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| | Primary Response (%) | Additional Response (%) |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Environmental issues being addressed | 16.0 | |
| Ease of participation | 9.0 | 10.0 |
| Convenience | 0.4 | |
| Like recycling a particular item | 0.7 | |
| Good idea | 23.1 | 10.0 |
| City is making an effort | 10.8 | |
| Opportunity to recycling | 3.7 | |
| Curbside pickup | 15.3 | 40.0 |
| It is voluntary | 0.7 | |
| Sorting into bags | 3.0 | |

| | Primary Response (%) | Additional Response (%) |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| It will be profitable | 1.1 | 30.0 |
| Are handling a lot of items | 0.4 | |
| Bakers' free bags | 0.4 | |
| Don't know enough | 6.0 | |
| Nothing | 8.6 | |
| Other | 0.7 | 10.0 |
| Number of responses | 268 | 10 |

6. What do you dislike most about The Omaha Effort Recycling Program?

| | Primary Response (%) | Additional Response (%) |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Poor coordination | 7.6 | 12.5 |
| Cost | 14.4 | 18.8 |
| Too much effort | 8.3 | 6.3 |
| Size of bags/color of bags | 2.5 | 12.5 |
| Don't provide containers | 1.1 | 3.1 |
| Political indecisiveness/problems | 9.0 | 6.3 |
| It's confusing/not well explained | 6.8 | 9.4 |
| Scarcity of bags | 0.7 | 3.1 |
| Blue bags and regular bags should not be picked up by same truck | 8.3 | 12.5 |
| Having to use different bags | 5.0 | 0.0 |
| City should encourage recycling of more items | 4.3 | 3.1 |
| Should not be mandatory | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| Difficult to get full participation/should be mandatory | 2.5 | 3.1 |
| Should have education along with it (to know benefits) | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| Does not include apartment dwellers | 0.4 | 0.0 |
| Don't know enough | 3.6 | 0.0 |
| Nothing | 16.2 | 0.0 |
| Like everything | 7.2 | 0.0 |
| Other | 1.4 | 9.4 |
| Number of responses | 278 | 32 |

10. Why are you no longer participating in The Omaha Effort Recycling Program? (This includes respondents who are aware of the Omaha Effort and participated at some point in time but are no longer participating.)

| | Percent |
|--|---------|
| The trouble with the first effort/political indecisiveness | 38.1 |
| It is inconvenient | 23.8 |
| The cost | 0.0 |
| Thought it had been discontinued | 9.5 |
| Too confusing | 14.3 |
| Bags were too small | 4.8 |
| Recycle elsewhere | 4.8 |
| Other | 4.8 |
| Number of responses | 21 |

**12. Why do you not use Blue Bags?
(This includes respondents who said "Drop-off" or "Neither" to Q 11.)**

| | Percent |
|---|---------|
| Thought it was discontinued | 9.5 |
| Cost | 28.6 |
| Too much effort | 4.8 |
| Want to know it's actually being recycled | 19.0 |
| Quality of Blue Bags | 4.8 |
| Not enough information | 4.8 |
| Recycle elsewhere | 4.8 |
| Don't like Omaha Effort | 4.8 |
| Other | 19.0 |
| Number of responses | .21 |

15. Why don't you recycle the items you mentioned?

| | Primary Response (%) | Additional Response (%) |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Time | 4.1 | 13.8 |
| Too much effort | 19.1 | 3.4 |
| Complacency | 12.3 | 3.4 |
| Insufficient information | 14.1 | 27.6 |
| Need different bags | 2.3 | 0.0 |
| Very little to recycle | 26.8 | 3.4 |
| Program does not work | 2.7 | 3.4 |
| No place/no pick-up | 4.5 | 3.4 |
| Cost | 3.6 | 6.9 |
| Space (not enough) | 4.1 | 27.6 |
| Messy | 0.9 | 3.4 |
| Don't have the equipment (mulcher) | 1.8 | 0.0 |
| Other | 3.6 | 3.4 |
| Number of responses | 220 | 29 |

16. Why do you recycle the items you mentioned?

| | Primary Response (%) | Additional Response (%) |
|---|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Concern for natural environment | 27.1 | 12.5 |
| Concern for the economy | 2.3 | 9.4 |
| Concern for natural resources | 8.9 | 18.8 |
| Receive money for recycling | 10.9 | 12.5 |
| Many people I know do it | 0.0 | 3.1 |
| It is the right thing to do | 17.1 | 18.8 |
| Omaha Effort is convenient | 12.0 | 15.6 |
| Reuse for fertilizer (reuse personally) | 2.7 | 0.0 |
| Habit - convenient to respondent | 15.1 | 9.4 |
| Other | 3.9 | 0.0 |
| Number of responses | 258 | 32 |