

Annual Drinking Water and Wastewater Survey

July 2020

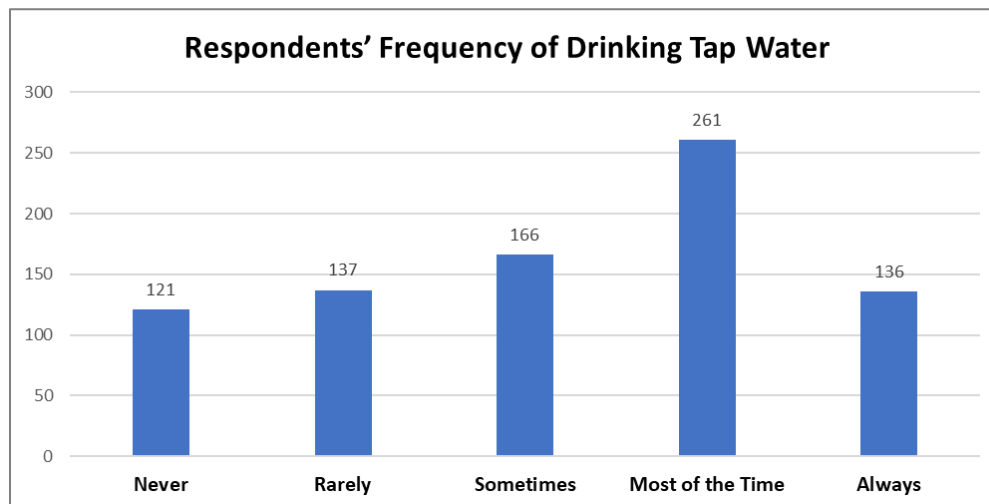
The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) issued a digital survey on water and wastewater knowledge, attitudes, and behavior to residents of metropolitan Washington. Below are a few key findings which will be used to inform how area utilities communicate with the region's residents and on which topics they focus that communication.

The survey was completed by 821 metropolitan Washington residents, and conducted on behalf of the 16 water and wastewater utilities and jurisdictions who oversee the regionwide water communication and outreach as part of COG's [Community Engagement Campaign](#). The group issues the survey annually to measure changes in water awareness and behaviors to protect area water and water infrastructure.

Key Findings

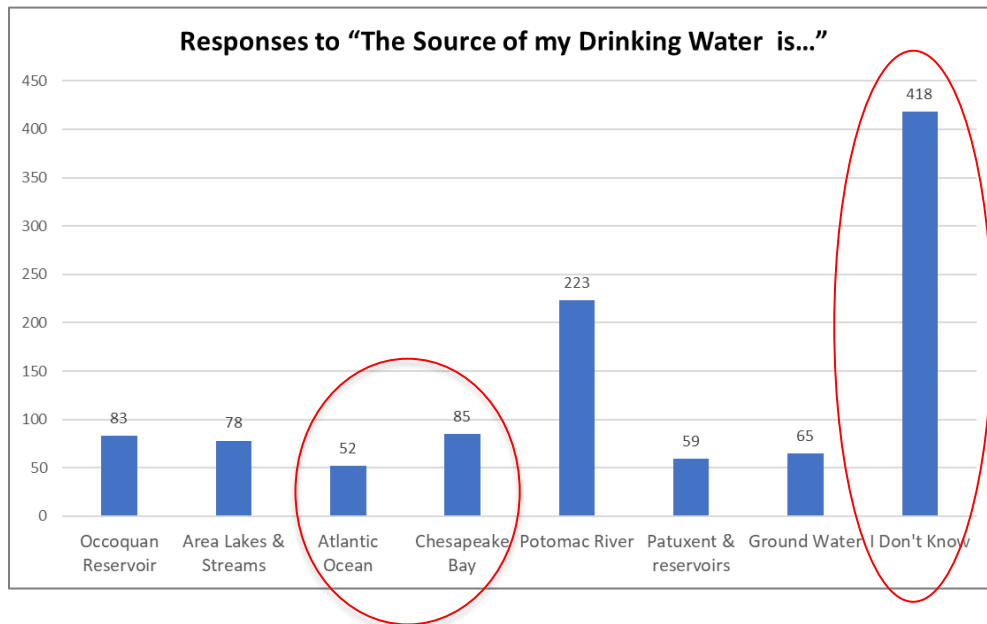
FREQUENCY OF DRINKING TAP WATER

Forty-eight percent of respondents drink tap all or most of the time. Those that "Rarely" or "Never" drink tap, cited taste (61%), odor (18%), safety (62%), convenience (5%), or other (14%) as the reason for this. This reveals an opportunity to educate about the safety and cleanliness of tap water.



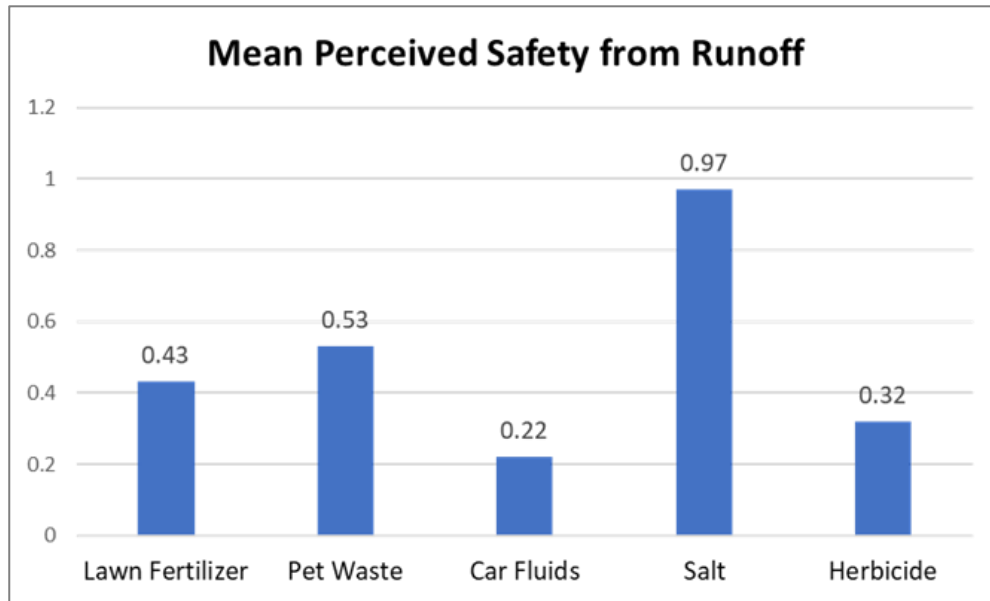
IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER

Over half of respondents were unsure of the source of their drinking water, signaling a need to communicate that the Potomac River is the major source of drinking water for metropolitan Washington residents.



PERCEIVED SAFETY OF RUNOFF

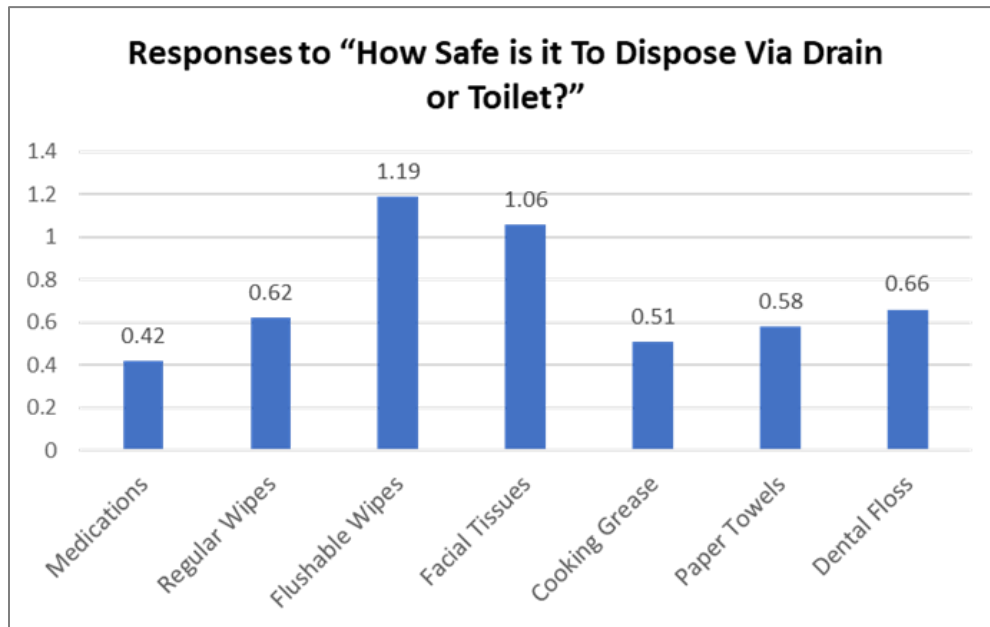
One third to half of survey respondents perceived lawn fertilizer, pet waste and herbicides to be “safe” in terms of their environmental impacts.



Winter salts were thought to be the least detrimental. All of these are capable of adding to stream pollution (nutrient and chemical runoff). This indicates an opportunity to urge residents to do their part to protect local streams by preventing polluted runoff from their own yards and pavement.

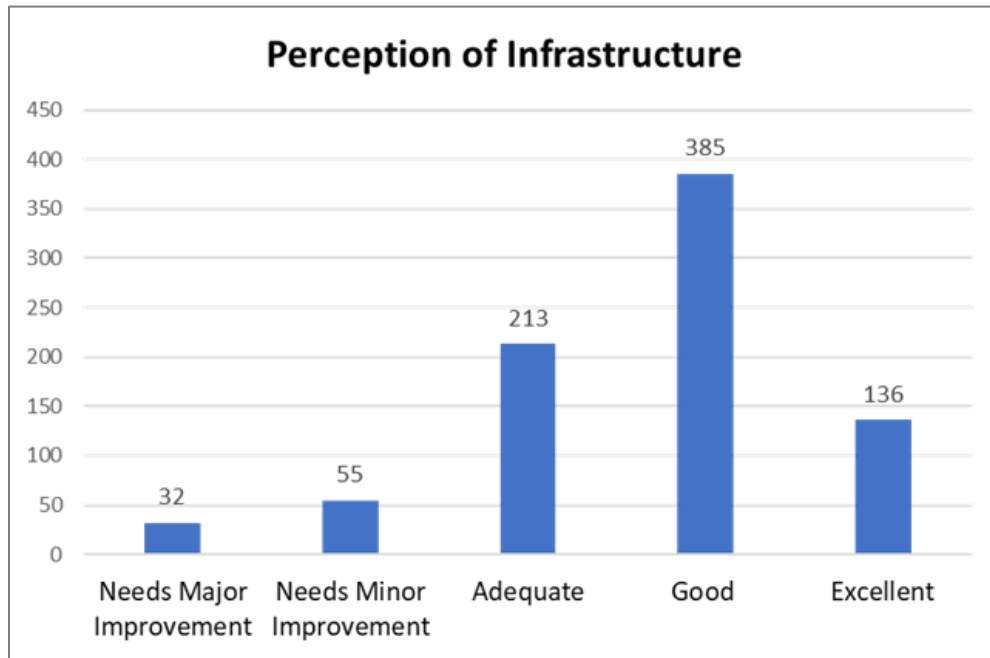
DISPOSING MATERIALS VIA DRAIN OR TOILET

Flushable wipes and facial tissues were perceived by respondents as being the most “safe to flush.” All of these materials, including wipes labeled as “flushable,” contribute to clogs in household plumbing and wastewater conveyance systems, a point that can be further communicated with residents.



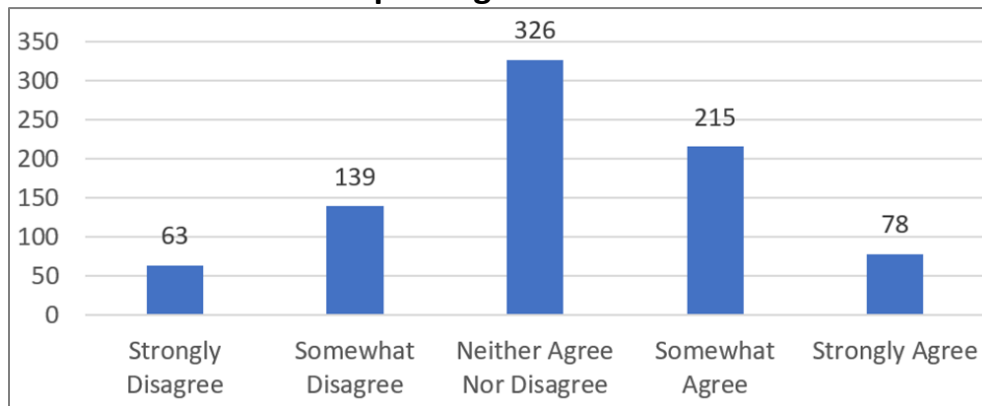
RATE HIKES AND CURRENT INFRASTRUCTURE CONDITIONS

Thirty-six percent of surveyed residents perceive the region's water and wastewater infrastructure to be in good condition.



However, approximately a third of respondents aren't sure how rates benefit water infrastructure, signaling a need for more communication about the connection between rate hikes and improved service.

Agreement that Rate Hikes are for Purpose of Improving Infrastructure



Survey Questions

Q1. My drinking water service is provided by

- A utility
- A private well

Q2. My wastewater service is provided by

- A utility
- A private septic system

Q3. Does the same utility provide both your water and wastewater?

- Same utility
- Different utilities
- I don't know

Q4. When I want to drink water, I drink water from a faucet (i.e. "tap water"):

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Most of the time
- Always

Q5. For those who answered "never" or "rarely" why don't you drink tap water more often?

- Taste
- Odor
- Safety
- Convenience
- Other

Q6. For those who answered "Safety" in Q5, please explain.

Q7. How often do you drink bottled water?

- Never
- Rarely
- Monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

Q8. How often does your household dispose of the following via drain or toilet?

- Medications
- Regular Wipes
- Flushable Wipes
- Facial Tissues
- Cooking Grease
- Paper Towels
- Dental Floss

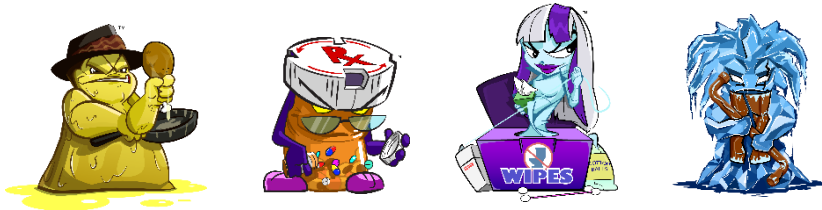
Q9. How safe do you think it is to dispose of the following items via drain or toilet?

- Medications
- Regular Wipes
- Flushable Wipes
- Facial Tissues
- Cooking Grease
- Paper Towels
- Dental Floss

Q10. How does your household dispose of unwanted medications (check all that apply)?

- Semi-annual drug take back day
- Use permanent drop box at pharmacy
- Use permanent drop box at government facility
- Throw them in the trash
- Other

Q11. Which of the following [Protect Your Pipes](#) campaign images have you seen before?



Q12. If you recalled seeing an image, where did you see it?

- Signs/Advertisements
- Utility communications (events/school outreach)
- Social media
- I don't recall

Q13. During snowy and icy conditions, how often does someone apply salt at your residence?

Q14. The source of my drinking water is (check all that apply):

- Occoquan Reservoir
- Area Lakes and Streams
- Atlantic Ocean
- Chesapeake Bay
- The Potomac River
- The Patuxent River and reservoirs
- Groundwater
- I Don't Know

Q15. How safe are the following materials for local waterways when they enter storm drains or through runoff?

- Lawn fertilizer
- Pet waste
- Car fluids
- Salt
- Herbicides

Q16. Rate water service on attributes.

- Quality of Water
- Taste of Water
- Customer Service Responsiveness
- Customer Service Friendliness
- Value of Service

Q17. Rate wastewater (for those with separate utilities)

- Customer Service Responsiveness
- Customer Service Friendliness
- Value of Service

Q18. What is the condition of water and wastewater infrastructure in your community?

- Excellent
- Good
- Adequate
- Needs Minor Improvements
- Need Major Improvements

Q19. How much do you trust the following groups to make smart decisions about infrastructure investments such as new pipes, pumps, or treatment processes?

- Elected officials
- Utility officials

Q20. How effective are the following for getting your questions answered by your water utility?

- Phone
- Website
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- In-Person

Q21. For those with a different utility for wastewater, how do you rate the following media for service interactions.

- Phone
- Website
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- In-Person

Q22. Please indicate your SINGLE preferred method for your water utility to contact you about EACH of the following issues:

- Billing and payment updates
- Non-urgent service updates (routine maintenance, new service or payment options)
- Emergency updates (boil advisories, disruptions in service)
- Water quality reports

- Rate increases

Q23. When my water and/or wastewater utility raises rates, it's to enhance the quality of its service.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q24. How often does your water and/or wastewater utility raise its rates?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

Q25. The sources I trust most for information about my drinking water or wastewater service are:

- Drinking Water Utility
- Wastewater Utility
- Local Government
- Local News
- Friends/Family
- Social Media
- Public Service Announcement

ABOUT COG

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.