



CEC Annual Water and Wastewater Survey Results August 2023

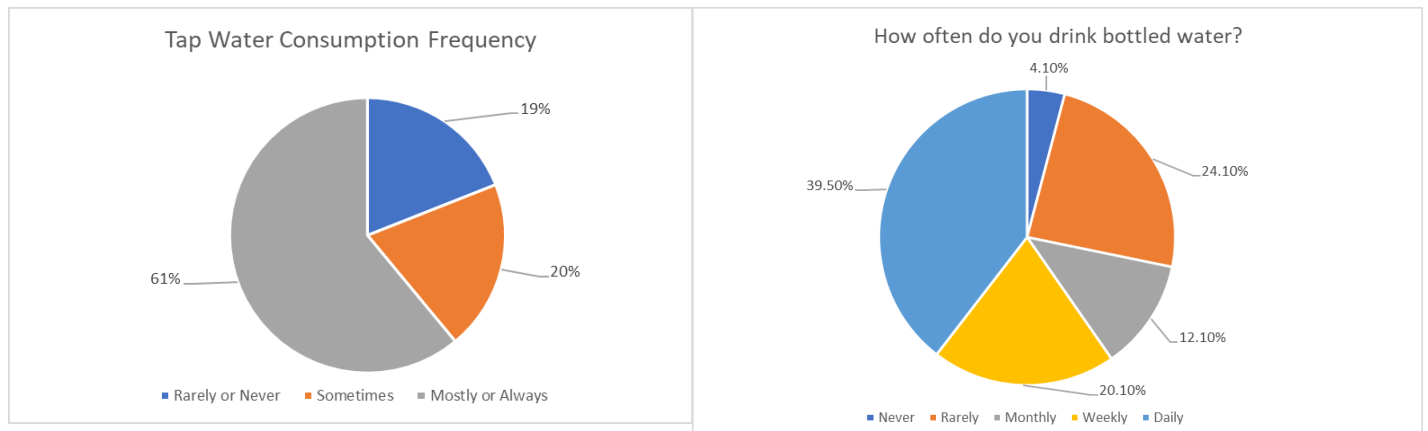
The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments' (COG) Community Engagement Campaign (CEC) issued its annual survey in May to 825 metropolitan Washington residents to gauge their knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes towards their water and wastewater services. Dinsmore Research conducted the survey for the fourth consecutive year, on behalf of the 14 water and wastewater utilities and jurisdictions who oversee the regionwide water communication and outreach as part of COG's [Community Engagement Campaign](#).

Survey results show many prior year consistencies regarding tap water consumption, limited knowledge of the Potomac as the region's primary water supply, toilet and drain disposal behaviors, and the opinion that water infrastructure is in "good" condition.

Key findings are as follows:

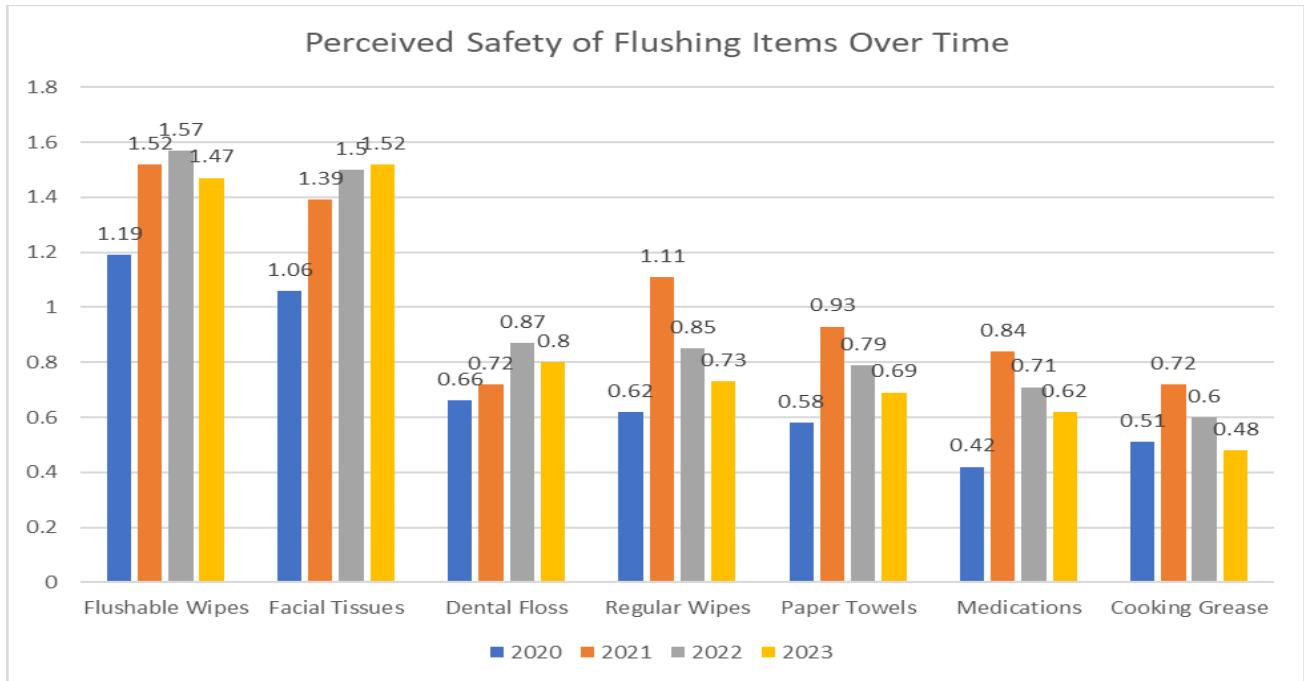
CONFIDENCE IN TAP WATER IS CONSISTENT

Two thirds of COG residents regularly drink tap water while the other third prefer bottled water. Given the consistently high quality of the region's drinking water, utilities can work to close this tap water consumption gap. An American Water Works Association ([AWWA](#)) [survey results report](#) of their May survey states that residents who have frequent communications from their utilities and more knowledge of their utility's water quality testing have better confidence in their tap water. Race, income, and gender also account for different levels of comfort with drinking tap water.



WHAT NOT TO FLUSH

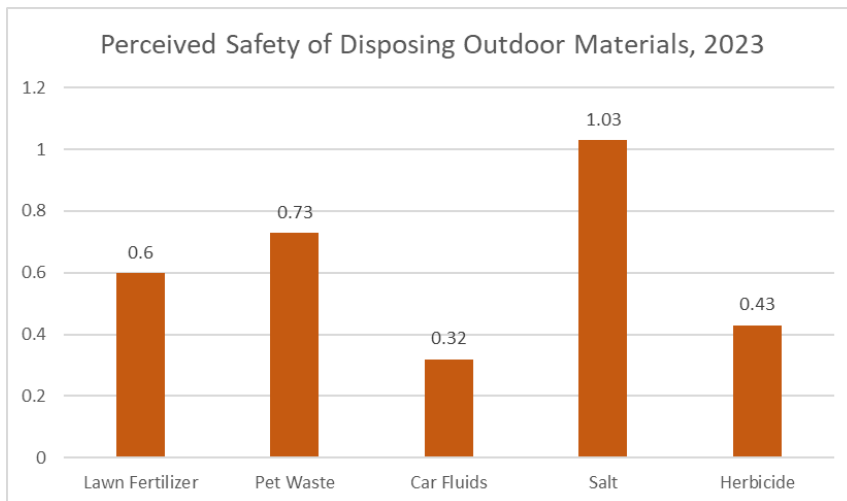
When asked how safe it is to dispose of items down the toilet, flushable wipes and facial tissues were perceived to be the least harmful, with facial tissue flushing on the rise, so there is room for [Protect Your Pipes](#) education that these items should be disposed of in the trash. Flushing them can clog household and public sewer lines.



STORM DRAIN POLLUTION

Likewise, when asked about the risk from substances like fertilizers, pet waste, car fluids, salt, and herbicides going down storm drains, salt is consistently perceived to be the least harmful. More education about the impacts of salt on local stream water quality as well as Potomac drinking water is needed.

Scale: 0-Not Safe, 1-Somewhat Unsafe, 2-Likely Safe, 3-Completely Safe



MOST TRUSTED SOURCES FOR WATER INFORMATION

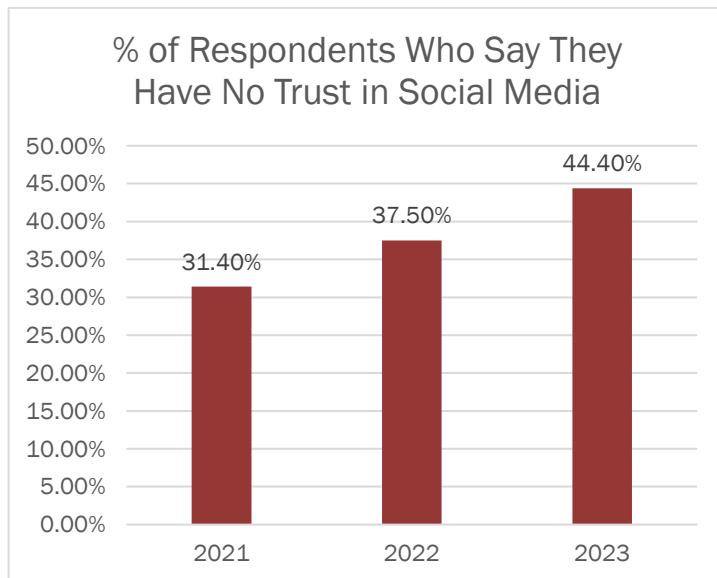
This year, and year-over-year data, shows social media declining as a trusted source of information. Conversely and fortunately, survey participants ranked public service announcements and their utilities as their most trusted sources of information about water and wastewater.

The ratings mostly follow the same order as prior years.

Scale: 0-Not Trusted, 1-Somewhat Trusted, 2-Mostly Trusted, 3-Completely Trusted

Source of Information	2020	2021	2022	2023
Public Service Announcements	1.69	1.82	1.78	1.78
Water Utility	1.67	1.81	1.73	1.77
Wastewater Utility	1.62	1.73	1.73	1.75
Local News	1.54	1.69	1.63	1.64
Local Government	1.53	1.74	1.62	1.62
Friends and Family	1.42	1.59	1.55	1.40
Social Media	0.80	1.09	.91	.79

Over time, distrust of social media has risen.



Survey Questions

Metropolitan Washington Drinking Water and Wastewater Use Survey 2023

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, on behalf of its member drinking water and wastewater utilities, is conducting this survey to help the utilities better communicate with you—their customers—on a number of topics. It should take you no more than 10 minutes to complete. Your answers are strictly anonymous.

Definitions of survey terms:-

- “Drinking water utility” means the same as “water utility”.
- “Drinking water” means the same as “tap water” or water that comes either from a faucet or through a filter or from a refrigerator.
- “Wastewater,” or sewer water, is water that is used for flushing, washing, and industrial practices from homes and businesses that goes down toilets or drains and enters the sewer system.

Q1—SCREENING QUESTION. My drinking water service is provided by:

- A utility
- A private well

Q2—SCREENING QUESTION. My wastewater service is provided by:

- A utility
- Private septic system

NOTE: For those who report having private well and/or septic, the survey will end.

Q3. Does the same utility provide your household with both drinking water and wastewater service, or are they different for each?

- Same utility

- Different utilities for each
- I don't know

Q4. When I want to drink water, I drink tap water (either from a faucet or through a filter or from a refrigerator):

- Mostly or Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely or Never

Q5. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer "Mostly or Always" in Q4>> When I drink tap water, it's typically:

- From a faucet
- Through a filter such as a Brita™ water pitcher
- From a water dispenser in my refrigerator

Q6a. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer that they use a filter in Q5>>

Please rate the importance of the following benefits in choosing to use a filter for your tap water:

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Improved Taste				
Improved Safety				
Improved Smell				
Improved Convenience				

Q6b. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer that get their water from their refrigerator in Q5>>

Please rate the importance of the following benefits in choosing to use the dispenser in your refrigerator for your tap water:

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Important	Very Important
Improved Taste				
Improved Safety				
Improved Smell				
Improved Convenience				

Q7. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer “Rarely” or “Never” in Q4>> If you chose “rarely” or “never” in the previous question, please indicate why. (Check all that apply)

- Taste
- Odor
- Safety Concerns
- Convenience
- Other: _____

Q8. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer "Safety Concerns" in Q7>>

What is concerning you about the safety of your drinking water?

	Not Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned
Ability of utility to remove pollutants/contaminants from water				
Quality of the water prior to being treated				
Things added to the water by the utility during treatment				
Quality of the pipes				
Security of the water supply				
Cybersecurity of utilities (e.g., hacking)				
Other _____				

Q9. The source of my drinking water is (check all that apply):

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

Q10. How often do you drink bottled water?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Rarely
- Never

Q11. How safe for your plumbing and/or the environment is it to dispose of the following down the drain or toilet?

	Not Safe	Somewhat Unsafe	Likely Safe	Completely Safe
Medications				
Regular Wipes				
Flushable Wipes				
Toilet Paper				
Tissues				
Cooking Grease				
Paper Towels				
Dental Floss				

Q12. How often does your household dispose of the following down the drain or toilet?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always
Medications					
Regular Wipes					
Flushable Wipes					
Tissues					
Cooking Grease					
Paper Towels					
Dental Floss					
Toilet Paper					

Q13. <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answer “Never” in Q12 about medications>> How does your household dispose of unwanted medications? (Check all that apply)

- Semi-annual drug take back day
- Use permanent dropbox at a health care facility such as a pharmacy, clinic or hospital
- Use permanent dropbox at a police station, fire station, or other government facility
- Throw them in the trash
- Put down drain or toilet
- Not Applicable: I/We don't take any medications
- Not Applicable: I/We always finish our medications
- Other _____

Q14 (Old Q16). Regarding activities outside the home: How safe are the following materials for local waterways when they enter storm drains or through runoff?

	Not Safe	Somewhat Unsafe	Likely Safe	Completely Safe
Lawn Fertilizer				
Pet Waste				
Car Fluids (oil, antifreeze, brake fluid)				
Salt (for de-icing walkways/driveways)				
Attention Check: Please click "Completely Safe"				
Herbicide/Weed Killer				

Q15 (Old Q17). During snowy and icy conditions, how often (if at all) does someone apply a deicer such as salt at your residence?

- Always (Value=4)
- Most of the Time (Value=3)
- Sometimes (Value=2)
- Rarely (Value=1)
- Never (Value=0)

Q16 (Old Q18). Please rate your water utility on the following:

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Not applicable or I have

						no opinion
Quality and reliability						
Price						
Conservation						
Billing and payment						
Communications						
Customer Service						

Q17 (Old Q19). <<Display logic: for those who answer that they have different utilities handle water and wastewater in Q3>> Please rate your wastewater utility on the following:

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Not applicable or I have no opinion
Quality and reliability						
Price						
Conservation						
Billing and payment						
Communications						
Customer Service						

Q18 (Old Q20). Do you believe the condition of your water and wastewater infrastructure (mains, pipes, water pumps, treatment facilities, etc.) in your community is:

- Excellent
- Good
- Adequate
- Needs Minor Improvements
- Needs Significant Improvements

Q19 (Old Q21). How effective are the following for getting your questions answered by your water utility:

	Not at all Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Not applicable or I have no opinion
Phone					

Website					
Email					
Facebook					
Twitter					
In-Person					

Q20 (Old Q22). <<DISPLAY LOGIC: Only for those who answered they have separate water and wastewater utilities in Q3>> How effective are the following for getting questions answered by your WASTEWATER utility:

	Not at all Effective	Somewhat Effective	Effective	Very Effective	Not applicable or I have no opinion
Phone					
Website					
Email					
Facebook					
Twitter					
In-Person					

Q21 (Old Q23). Please indicate your SINGLE preferred method for your water and wastewater utility to contact you about EACH of the following issues:

	Email	Facebook	Phone	Twitter	Text	Mail
Billing and payment updates						
Non-urgent service updates (routine maintenance, new service or payment options)						
Emergency updates (water quality advisories, disruptions in service)						
Water quality reports						
Rate increases						
Newsletters						

Q22 (Old Q24). When your water and/or wastewater utility raises rates, it's to enhance the quality of its service.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23 (Old Q25). How often does your water and/or wastewater utility raise its rates?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never
- I don't know.

Q24 (Old Q26). The sources I trust most for *information about my drinking water or wastewater service* are:

	Not Trusted	Somewhat Trusted	Mostly Trusted	Completely Trusted
Drinking Water Utility				
Wastewater Utility				
Local Government				
Local News				
Friends/Family				
Social Media				
Public Service Announcements				

Q25 (Old Q27). The sources I trust most for *news and information generally* are:

	Not Trusted	Somewhat Trusted	Mostly Trusted	Completely Trusted
Direct from the Organization Making the News				
National News				
Local Government				
Local News				
Friends/Family				
Social Media				
Public Service Announcements				

Q26 (Old Q28). Are you aware of **government** programs to help low income households pay for their water and wastewater services?

- Yes
- No

Q27 (Old Q29). Are you aware of **utility** programs for long-term financial assistance programs to households struggling to pay their water/wastewater bill?

- Yes
- No

Q28 (Old Q30). Please enter your home zip code: _____

Q29 (Old Q31). How many years have you lived in the Metro Washington area (Metropolitan Washington area means Washington, DC and the surrounding Maryland and northern Virginia cities and counties.)? _____

Q30 (Old Q32). Do you rent or own your residence?

- Rent
- Own

Q31 (Old Q33). Are you the person in the household who typically pays the bill for water and/or wastewater service?

- Yes
- No

<<Dynamically served to people who say “Yes” to Q31>>

Q32. How do you receive your bill for your water/wastewater provider?

- Paper bill in the mail (Value=1)
- Email (Value=2)
- Text (Value=3)
- I am not billed directly, water/wastewater is included in another fee such as rent, home owner’s association, etc.
- Other _____

<<Q33 will be dynamically served to people who say they receive some form of bill—options 1, 2, or 3—in Q32>>

Q33. Do you read the educational content included in your bill?

- Always
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Never

Q34. Which of the following best describes your dwelling?

- Single family home
- Town home
- Condominium/Apartment
- Other: _____

Q35. Are you aware that your water utility publishes an annual report measuring the quality of your drinking water?

- Yes
- No

<<To be served to those who answered “Yes” in Q35>>

Q36a. Have you read a water quality report from your water service provider?

- Yes
- No

<<To be served to those who answered “No” in Q35>>

Q36b. How likely would you be to read a water quality report from your water service provider?

- Definitely
- Very Likely
- Likely
- Somewhat Likely
- Not at All Likely

Q37 (Old Q36). In what year were you born? _____

Q38 (Old Q37). Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

- African American/Black
- Asian
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- Pacific Islander
- White/Caucasian
- Other: _____

Q39 (Old Q38). What is your household’s average annual combined income?

- \$0-\$25,000
- \$25,001-\$50,000
- \$50,001-\$75,000
- \$75,001-\$100,000
- \$100,001-\$125,000
- \$125,001-\$150,000
- \$150,001-\$200,000
- \$200,001-\$250,000
- More than \$250,000

Q40 (Old Q39). In terms of gender, I identify as:

- Female
- Male
- Transgender Female
- Transgender Male
- Gender Variant/Non-Conforming
- Other _____
- Prefer Not to Answer

Q41. If you would like to receive communications from your water/wastewater utility, please enter your email where you can be reached.

Thank you for taking the survey.



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