

Annual Drinking Water and Wastewater Survey

July 2022

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) worked with Dinsmore Research for the third consecutive year to issue 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 824 metropolitan Washington residents and conducted on behalf of the 13 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

TRUSTED SOURCES FOR INFORMATION ABOUT DRINKING WATER OR WASTEWATER

Residents trusted their utilities more than other sources for information about their water.

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

Source for Information	2022 Survey Findings
PSAs	1.78
Water Utility	1.73
Waste Water Utility	1.73
Local News	1.63
Local Govt	1.62
Friends and Family	1.55
Social Media	.91

PERCEIVED CONDITION OF WATER AND WASTEWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Water and wastewater infrastructure was seen as being in increasing need of repair. Compared to the two prior years, there was an increase in percentage of those answering, “Needs Minor Improvements” and a drop in those answering “Excellent”. Those who had the most positive regard for utilities and tap water also have the most concern for water infrastructure.

Scale: 2-Needs Major Improvements, 1-Needs Minor Improvements, 0-Adequate, 1-Good, 2-Excellent

Condition of Water Infrastructure	2022 responses
Needs Major Improvements	48 (5.8%)
Needs Minor Improvement	97 (11.8%)
Adequate	218 (26.5%)
Good	360 (43.7%)
Excellent	101 (12.3%)
TOTAL	824 (100%)

KNOWLEDGE OF WHERE DRINKING WATER COMES FROM

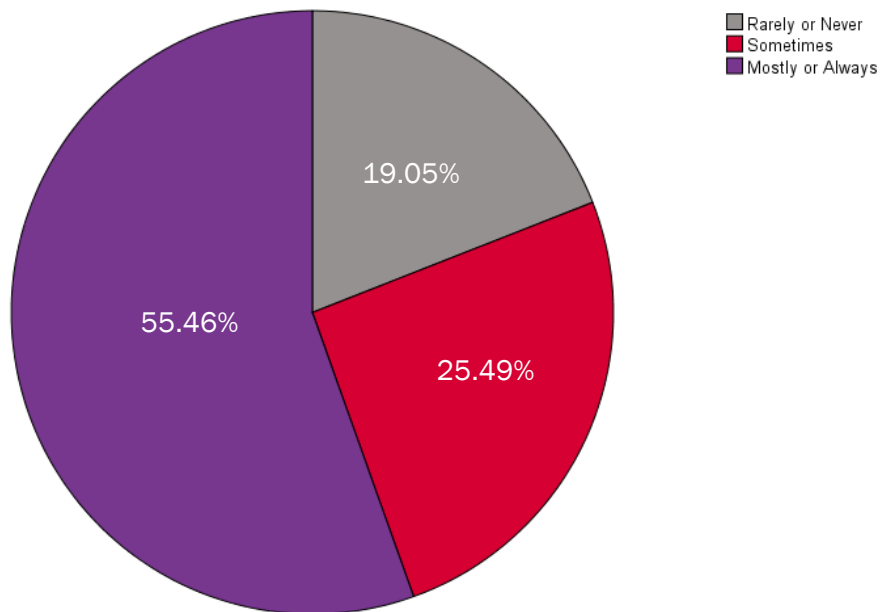
When residents were asked to identify the source of their drinking water (check all that apply), 56 percent replied that they “didn’t know” the source of their drinking water. This, combined with the other incorrect answers, signals a need to communicate that the Potomac River is the major source of drinking water for metropolitan Washington residents.

Responses to the question “The source of my drinking water is...” (check all that apply).

Source of Drinking Water	2022 Responses
I Don't Know	458 (56%)
Potomac River	179 (22%)
Occoquan Reservoir	97 (12%)
Area Lakes and Streams	82 (10%)
Patuxent River and Reservoirs	77 (9%)
Chesapeake Bay	74 (9%)

FREQUENCY OF DRINKING TAP WATER

Fifty-five percent of respondents drink tap all or most of the time. Those that “rarely or never” drink tap cited taste and safety concerns. African Americans were least trusting of tap water. This reveals an opportunity to educate residents about the safety and cleanliness of tap water.



DISPOSING MATERIALS VIA DRAIN OR TOILET

Flushable wipes, followed by facial tissues and dental floss 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. Older respondents and female respondents had more environmentally friendly practices.

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

Perceived “flush-ability”	Rank
Toilet Paper	2.31
Flushable Wipes	1.57
Facial Tissues	1.50
Dental Floss	0.87
Regular Wipes	0.85
Paper Towels	0.79
Medications	0.71
Cooking Grease	0.60

Survey Questions

Q1. My drinking water service is provided by:

- A utility
- A private well

Q2. My wastewater service is provided by:

- A utility
- Private septic system

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. 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. 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. 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. If you chose “rarely” or “never” in the previous question, please indicate why. (Check all that apply)

- Taste
- Odor
- Safety Concerns
- Convenience
- Other

Q8. What is concerning you about the safety of your drinking water?

	Not Concerned	Somewhat Concerned	Concerned	Very Concerned
Quality of the water being treated				
(delete space)				
Quality of the pipes				
Security of the water supply				
Cybersecurity of utilities (e.g., hacking)				
The quality of water after being treated by water utility (e.g., chemicals or additives used in the treatment process)				
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. 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 prescriptions
- Other

Q14. Area water and wastewater utilities have launched a regional advertising campaign to help remind consumers how to protect their pipes from fats, oils and grease, wipes, and medication. Can you recall what the advertising campaign looked like? (Check any of the images you've seen before.)



I don't recall seeing any of these

Q15. Can you recall where you saw any of those images? Please check all that apply.

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

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				

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

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

Q18. Please rate your water utility on the following:

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Not applicable or I have no opinion
Quality of Water						
Taste of Water						
Customer Service Responsiveness						
Customer Service Friendliness						
Value of Service						

Q19. Please rate your wastewater utility on the following:

	Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Not applicable or I have no opinion
Customer Service Responsiveness						
Customer Service Friendliness						
Value of Service						

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

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					

Q22. 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					

Q23. Please indicate your SINGLE preferred method for your water 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						

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

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

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

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				

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				

Q28. How do you feel about federal programs to help low-income households pay for their water and wastewater services?

- Strongly Oppose
- Oppose
- Slightly Oppose
- Neutral or No Opinion
- Slightly Support
- Support
- Strongly Support

Q29. Are you aware of the long-term financial assistance programs offered by your utility to households struggling to pay their water/wastewater bill?

- Yes
- No

Q30. Please enter your home zip code:

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.)?

Q32. Do you rent or own your residence?

- Rent
- Own

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

- Yes
- No

Q34. Which of the following best describes your dwelling?

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

Q35. Is your household billed directly by the utility for its water and/or wastewater service, or is it included in another fee such as monthly rent, condo fees, or homeowner association fees?

- The household is billed directly by the utility
- Water and wastewater service are included in another fee such as rent or homeowner association fees
- N/A, I don't know

Q36. In what year were you born?

Q37. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?

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

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-\$175,000
- \$175,001-\$200,000
- \$200,001-\$225,000
- \$225,001-\$250,000
- More than \$250,000

Q39. In terms of gender, I identify as:

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