

Annual Drinking Water and Wastewater Survey

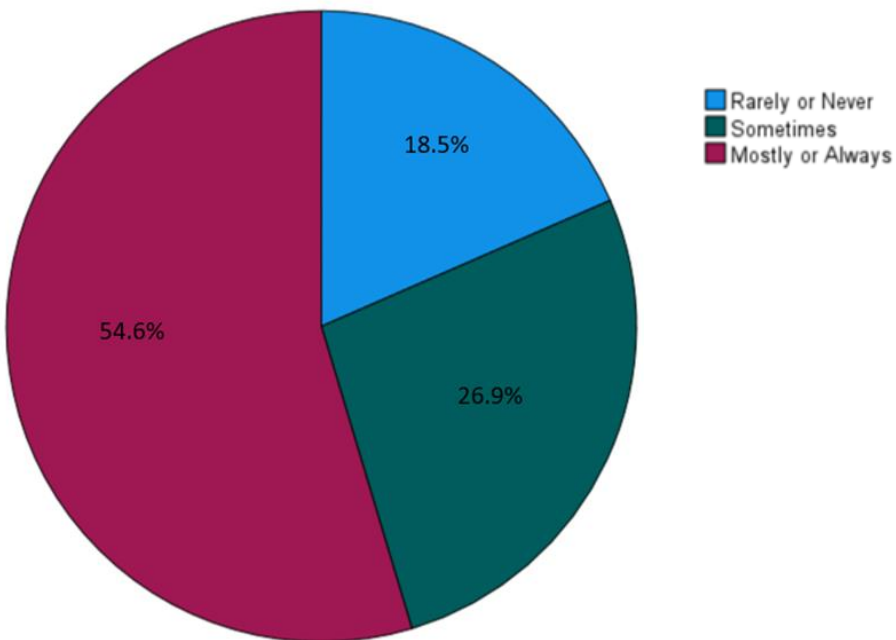
July 2021

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) worked with Dinsmore Research 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 937 metropolitan Washington residents, and conducted 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](#). 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

Fifty-five percent of respondents drink tap all or most of the time. Those that "Rarely" or "Never" drink tap, cited safety concerns (72%), and taste (63%) 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

When residents were asked to identify the source of their drinking water (check all that apply), 43 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.

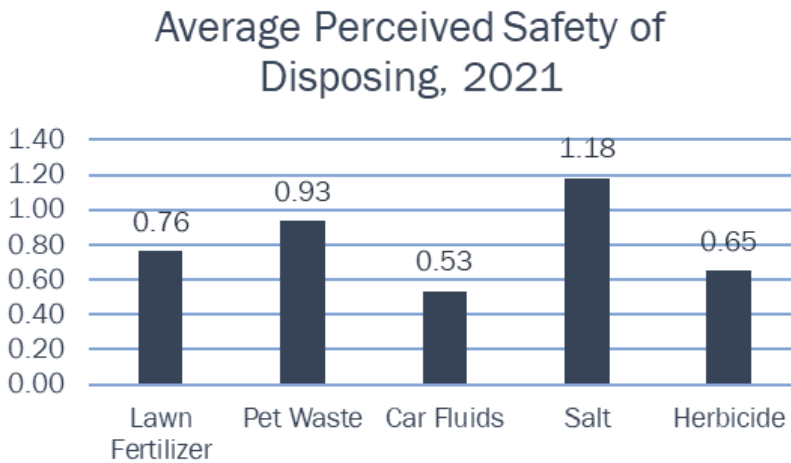
2021 Responses

| | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Occoquan Reservoir | 145 | 15.47% |
| Area Lakes and Streams | 123 | 13.13% |
| Atlantic Ocean | 89 | 9.50% |
| Chesapeake Bay | 129 | 13.77% |
| Potomac River | 102 | 10.89% |
| Patuxent River and Reservoirs | 94 | 10.03% |
| I Don't Know | 403 | 43.01% |

PERCEIVED SAFETY OF MATERIALS ENTERING STORMWATER RUNOFF

Winter salts were thought to be the least detrimental of materials that enter stormwater runoff from yards and driveways.

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

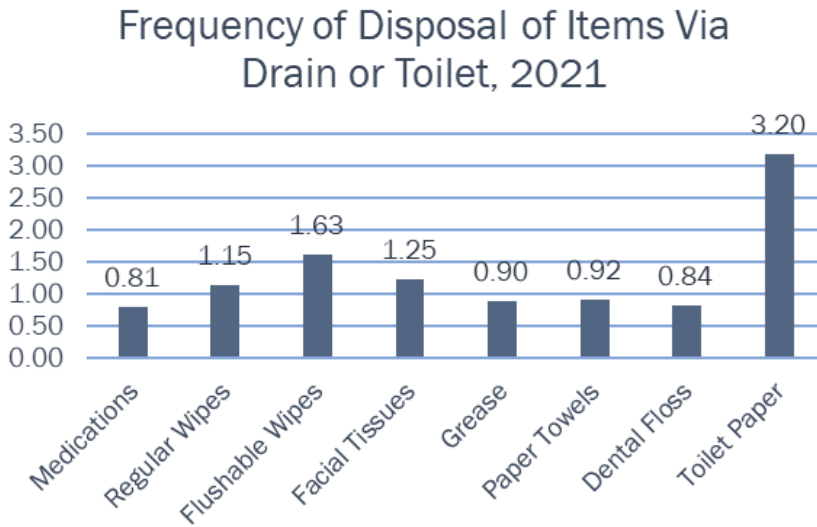


All of these are capable of adding to stream pollution (nutrient and chemical runoff). This indicates an opportunity to urge residents to do their part to protect local streams by preventing polluted runoff from their own yards and pavement.

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.

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



NEED FOR & AWARENESS OF UTILITY COVID RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Younger, poorer consumers who rented their homes were more likely to report having a need for water bill financial assistance. Charles County, which reported the highest need, also reported the highest awareness. Per the table below, the highest need and awareness of programs ranked closely, though not identically.

Scale: Utility Relief Assistance Need 0-None, 1-Weak, 2-Moderate, 3-Somewhat Strong, 4-Very Strong, I Don't Know

| | Awareness | Need |
|------------------------|-----------|------|
| Alexandria | 0.76 | 2.21 |
| Arlington | 0.58 | 1.77 |
| District of Columbia | 0.45 | 1.77 |
| Fairfax | 0.43 | 1.21 |
| Frederick | 0.64 | 2.32 |
| Loudon | 0.27 | 1.46 |
| Montgomery | 0.46 | 1.34 |
| Prince George's County | 0.49 | 1.83 |
| Prince William County | 0.40 | 1.59 |
| Rockville | 0.43 | 2.32 |
| Vienna | 0.58 | 2.21 |
| Charles County | 0.77 | 2.65 |

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 or from a refrigerator

Q6. Please rate the importance of the following benefits in choosing to filter 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. Please rate how much the following items concern you as they pertain to the safety of your drinking water:

| | Not Concerned | Somewhat Concerned | Concerned | Very Concerned |
|---|---------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|
| Safety or healthiness of water sources such as rivers and | | | | |
| The utility's ability to clean/treat the | | | | |
| Integrity of infrastructure such as pipes | | | | |
| Overall security of the water supply | | | | |
| The quality/healthiness of additives such as fluoride used to treat the water | | | | |
| Other | | | | |

Q9. 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
- 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 | | | | |
| Facial 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 | | | | | |
| Facial Tissues | | | | | |
| Cooking Grease | | | | | |
| Paper Towels | | | | | |
| Dental Floss | | | | | |

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
- 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

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) | | | | |
| 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 |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 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 (boil 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

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. How would you describe your household's need for financial assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Very Strong
- Somewhat Strong
- Moderate
- Weak
- None
- I Don't Know

Q28. Are you aware of the utility relief programs offered to households struggling to pay their water/wastewater bill specifically due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No

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 DC area?

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