



Our Region's Trusted Water Leader
San Diego County Water Authority

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News Release

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New Public Opinion Poll Shows Most County Residents Are Saving Water

Drought awareness and commitment to conservation are widespread

August 26, 2022 – San Diego County residents have taken multiple actions to conserve water and nearly two-thirds feel they can do more, according to a regional public opinion survey released by the San Diego County Water Authority.

As in prior polls, approximately nine in ten respondents recognize the importance of water to the San Diego region's economy and quality of life, and an overwhelming majority (88%) agree that they have a civic duty to use water efficiently. Even though conservation has become a way of life in San Diego County, two-thirds (66%) of respondents feel they can do "a little more" or "much more" to conserve.

"San Diego County residents appreciate the importance of a safe and reliable water supply, and they are taking actions to ensure the long-term reliability of the water supply," said Water Authority Board Chair Gary Croucher. "They also recognize they can do more to cut back through a variety of actions like washing full loads of dishes, fixing leaks, and purchasing efficient toilets and shower heads. In addition, the survey shows there are still numerous landscapes that can be upgraded with low-water plants and more efficient irrigation technology."

2022 Public Opinion Survey

Conducted with 889 county residents by telephone and online from July 7 to July 21, 2022, by True North Research.

All participants were at least 18 years old, and reside in San Diego County.

The margin of error is $\pm 3.3\%$.

Full results: www.sdewa.org/publications/.

The Water Authority has performed periodic public opinion research over the past 25 years to gauge residents' knowledge and attitudes about water issues. The latest survey of 889 adults in San Diego County was conducted by Encinitas-based True North Research from July 7 to 21,

and results were presented to the agency's Board of Directors during Thursday's regular monthly meeting. The margin of error for the poll is +/-3.3%.

This year, for the first time, the survey included layer of data to accommodate the Water Authority's interest in evaluating how survey responses differ among residents living in environmentally disadvantaged communities. The study oversampled households in census tracts identified by the Environmental Health Hazard Assessment's CalEnviroScreen database as disproportionately burdened by pollution and with population characteristics that make them more sensitive to pollution. The survey results and analysis shed light on impacted communities' views on the full range of water-related topics.

Survey results show that across the board, affordable housing is the most prominent top-of-mind issue (32%) in the region, followed by homelessness (27%) and cost of living (18%) – similar to the previous survey in 2019. Only about 8% of respondents mentioned water-related topics such as drought, cost or quality as the most important top-of-mind issue, but that was up from 3% in 2019.

While drought may not be the most pressing issue in most people's minds, there is widespread awareness countywide about extremely hot and dry conditions. Eight in ten (81%) respondents agreed that California is experiencing drought, with half (53%) of the opinion that the current drought is more severe than others in the past. Eight in ten (79%) were at least somewhat concerned about statewide drought conditions, though respondents expressed more confidence in the county's water supplies than they did in supplies for the entire state or Southern California.

On the topic of conservation, more than 80% of respondents said they were at least "somewhat" attentive to water use, and approximately 80% also reported taking conservation actions such as fixing leaks and drips in a timely manner; making a practice of running the dishwasher and washing machine only when full; and reducing water use with brushing teeth and showering. It's noteworthy, however, that the percentage of respondents who had yet to take a specific water conservation action but were realistically willing to do so in the next 12 months was low. It ranged from 2% to 9% across all actions tested.

When it comes to supply reliability in San Diego County, nearly two-thirds (63%) of respondents trust local water agencies to ensure a reliable water supply over the long-term. However, 51% of respondents expect the reliability of water supplies in San Diego County to become worse over the next year, up from 40% in 2019.

The 2022 survey also explored issues of cost. It highlighted the fact that there's relatively low understanding of how much residents pay for a gallon of tap water, although awareness of the true cost of water has improved over the past three years with less overestimation. After being told that the retail cost of municipal tap water in the San Diego region is less than 2 cents per gallon, more than three-quarters felt it is either an excellent (22%), good (24%) or fair (28%) value. Overall, fewer respondents said water was a good, fair, or excellent value in 2022 compared to 2019. Opinions were split about the need for future water rate increases to enhance reliability, with just over half (52%) of respondents saying they will be needed.

In addition, the poll showed significant support for discounted water services for qualified low-income households. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) support a hypothetical program to provide discounted water services to qualified, low-income households. Survey participants were also asked to if they support such a program even if it raised the cost of water services by \$1 to \$3 per month. Although support for the program declined once the cost trade-off was introduced, a majority (55%) of respondents indicated they would still support the program.

Full poll results and cross-tabs are at www.sdcwa.org/publications/. Use the pull-down menu to select “public opinion research.”

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The San Diego County Water Authority sustains a \$240 billion regional economy and the quality of life for 3.3 million residents through a multi-decade water supply diversification plan, major infrastructure investments and forward-thinking policies that promote fiscal and environmental responsibility. A public agency created in 1944, the Water Authority delivers wholesale water supplies to 24 retail water providers, including cities, special districts and a military base.



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