

ENVIRONMENTAL SYNOPSIS

The Chairman's Corner

Rep. Scott E. Hutchinson, Chairman

Do you ever think twice when you fill your glass with water from the kitchen tap or as you flush the commode at home or work? As long as we have running water or our sewage system doesn't back up or overflow, most of us probably don't. It's not until a problem arises or we receive an increase in our water or sewer bill that many of us pause to think about where our water comes from or where our wastewater goes and how it gets there.

Of course, we know it's not magic. It took planning and labor to construct the systems and they require care and maintenance, and sometimes expansion and renovation and replacement. Given the importance of such systems to our lives and livelihoods, perhaps some deeper thought should be given to them.

To find out what people might think and to promote more serious discussion about such systems, the Joint Legislative Conservation Committee (Committee) recently sponsored a series of questions in a statewide telephone survey about water and sewer systems in Pennsylvania. The Mansfield University Statewide Survey has been conducted annually since 1990, and the Committee has historically sponsored a series of environmental questions as part of the survey. This year was no exception and the survey polled 920 Pennsylvanians on their water and sewer systems -- their quality, what citizens pay for the systems, what problems citizens may have had and who should have authority over the systems.



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The results of the 2007 Mansfield University Statewide Survey on water and sewer systems in Pennsylvania can be found on pages 3 - 6

The complete results of the 2007 survey can be found on pages 3 – 6, but I'd like to offer some background, a brief review and some observations about the responses here.

First, as much as the Committee might like to take credit for this year's questions, we cannot do so. While it is true the Committee asked some similar questions in 2002, this year's questions were inspired by and asked in cooperation with Southwest Pennsylvania's Regional Water Management Task Force. The task force is an 11-county effort to improve regional cooperation in addressing SW PA's water and sewer challenges. The initiative, a potential model for other counties around the state of PA, is led by an independent task force that has high-level representation from all 11 counties, is endorsed by the Southwestern PA Commission and is chaired by Carnegie Mellon University President Jared Cohon. The task force wanted to know the opinions of residents of SW PA on water and sewer issues and the Committee wanted to know opinions statewide.

(continued on page 8)

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



CRAIG D. BROOKS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) announced last month that they are providing up to \$200 million over the next five years to support research and development of small scale refineries that produce ethanol and other biofuels from cellulosic matter. The DOE is seeking research projects to develop liquid transportation fuels such as ethanol as well as bio-based chemicals and products used in industrial applications. The money is intended to advance two goals: making cellulosic ethanol cost competitive with gasoline by 2012; and assisting in reducing the nation's gasoline consumption by 20 percent in 10 years by expanding the availability of alternative and renewable transportation fuels.

Research has shown that ethanol produced from switchgrass and other plants, called cellulosic ethanol, contains more net energy and results in fewer greenhouse gas emissions than traditional corn-based ethanol. However, this type of ethanol requires a more complex and expensive refining process because plant cell walls are difficult to break down into the sugars from which biofuels are produced.

Research and development into biofuel production using cellulosic matter is the focus of Department of Energy funding

As a result, most ethanol in the United States is currently produced from the starches of corn and other grain crops, which break down relatively easily. However, because not enough corn can be planted to produce sufficient quantities of ethanol, researchers are trying to find ways to produce cellulosic ethanol economically.

The DOE has indicated that of the \$200 million in funding available for small biorefineries, up to \$15 million is expected to be available in fiscal year 2007, with the remaining \$185 million expected to be available in FY 2008-2011, subject to appropriation from Congress.

The small biorefineries will also compliment the development of six full-scale biorefineries for which the DOE recently provided up to \$385 million over four years. These full-scale biorefineries will focus on the near-term commercial processes while the smaller facilities will experiment with cellulosic feedstocks and processing technologies.

Pennsylvania is a player in the ethanol and alternative energy communities

The continuing focus on Pennsylvania's energy policy has generated great interest in the alternative energy community. The Pennsylvania Ethanol Coalition has organized to speak to the state's energy policy. Representatives from more than half of the planned ethanol plants in Pennsylvania, along with supporting industries, have agreed to work together to aid in the expansion of the alternative fuels market in the commonwealth. The coalition will be supporting specific state policies and has recommended funding in the state budget for public education efforts that support and promote the use of biofuels.

The coalition is also supporting a Pennsylvania BioPreferred Program, including a directive for all state agencies to increase their procurement, purchase and use of these biopreferred products as long as they are reasonably priced, available and comparable in performance. The coalition will also be working to promote various funding initiatives, including investment tax credits for qualified alternative energy enterprises.

SURVEY RESULTS

The Mansfield University Statewide Survey - 2007 Water and Sewer System Issues

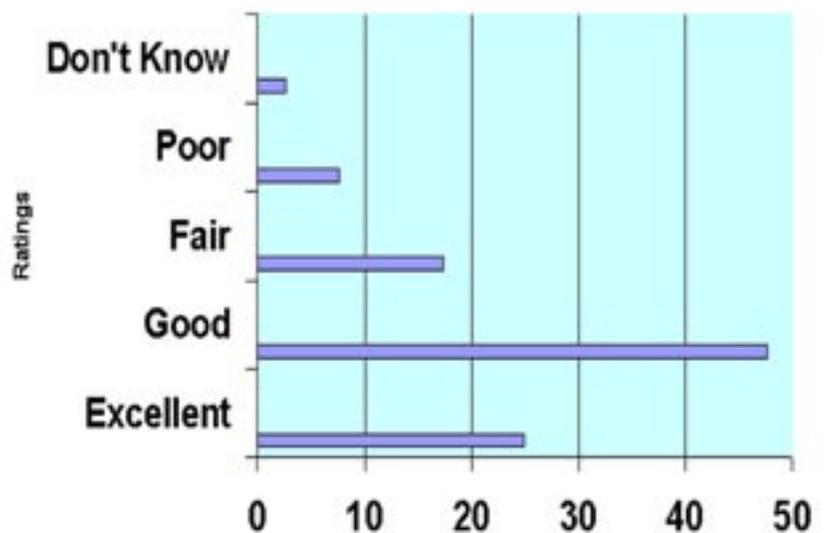


To learn more about what Pennsylvanians are thinking about the environment, the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee (Committee) again commissioned a series of questions through the Mansfield University Statewide Survey 2007, an annual statewide telephone survey formerly known as "The Public Mind." This year, the Committee's questions concerned water and sewer systems – their quality, their importance, funding for improvements and governance of same. Read the "Chairman's Corner" on page one for some thoughts and comments on the survey's results.

I. Rating Water Quality and Reliability Around the State

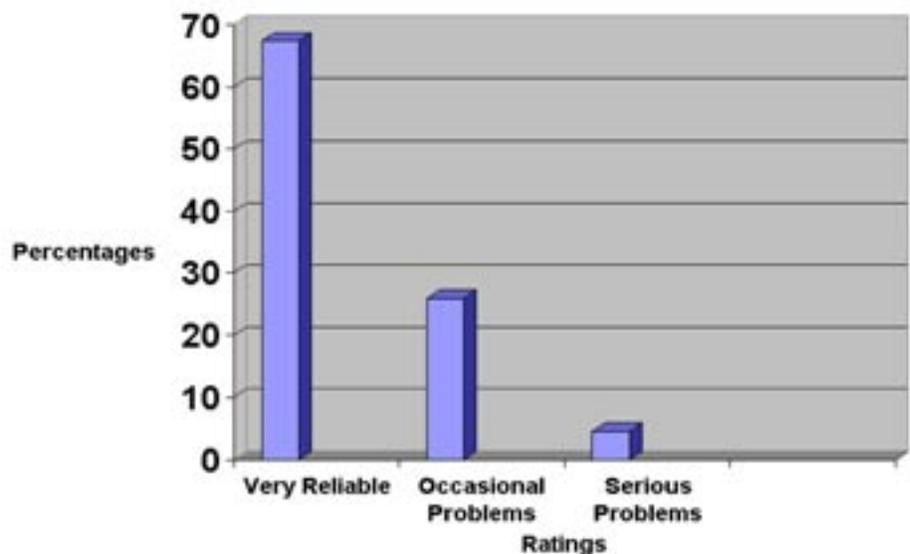
More than 70 percent of those surveyed (72.5 percent) rated the quality of their water as good (47.6 percent) or excellent (24.9 percent). Twenty-five percent rated water quality as fair or poor, with 17.4 percent choosing fair and 7.6 percent poor.

Rate the Quality of Water in Your Community



Current State of Drinking Water and Sewage Systems

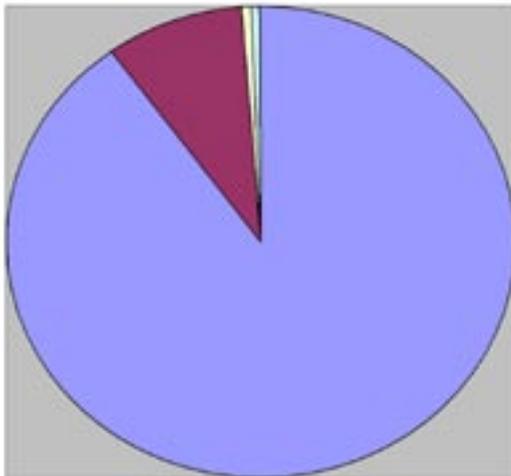
For the most part, Pennsylvanians responding to the poll were pleased with their current drinking water and sewage systems. More than two-thirds (67.5 percent) rated their system as reliable, while 25.9 percent said they had "occasional problems." Only 4.6 percent noted serious problems.



II. The Importance of Water Quality

Two sets of responses speak to the issue above.

How Important is Clean Water in PA Rivers and Streams

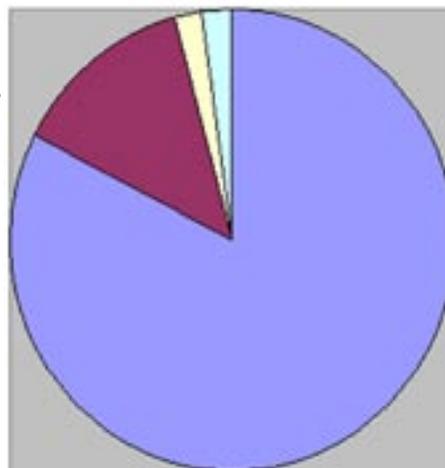


The first relates to the importance of having clean water in Pennsylvania's rivers and streams (see accompanying chart).

Overwhelmingly (90.1 percent), Pennsylvanians polled felt that it was very important to have clean water in rivers and streams. Another 8.9 percent felt it was somewhat important, leaving only one percent who denied its importance or didn't know.

An overwhelming number of Pennsylvanians (95.7 percent) made the connection between water-related issues (i.e., safe drinking water, proper sewage treatment, flood control and clean water for recreational purposes) and Pennsylvania's economic competitiveness. More than 82 percent felt such issues were very important, and another 13.2 percent said they were somewhat important.

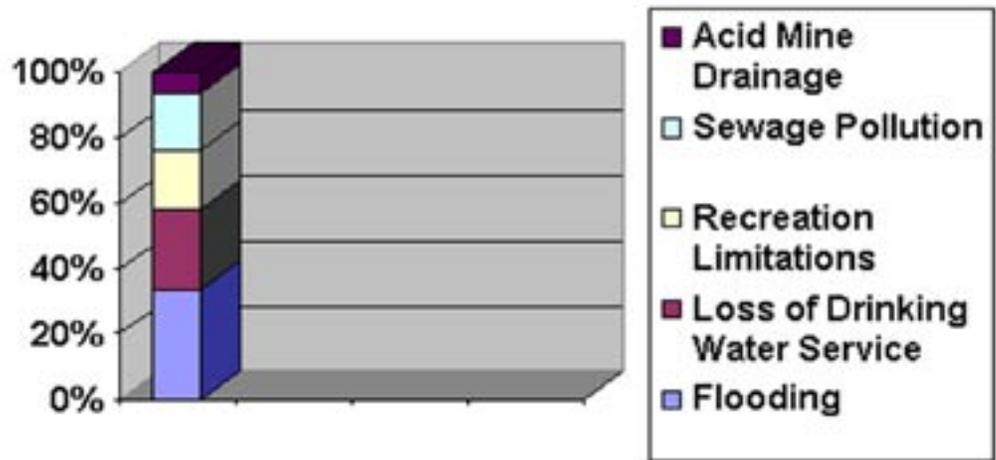
The Importance of Water-related Issues to Economic Competitiveness



III. Have You Been Affected...?

The survey asked if respondents had ever been affected by a series of water- and sewer-related problems while living in Pennsylvania. Among these problems were flooding, acid mine drainage, limits on recreational activity due to water pollution, sewage pollution problems and loss of drinking water service.

What Has Affected You While Living in Pennsylvania?

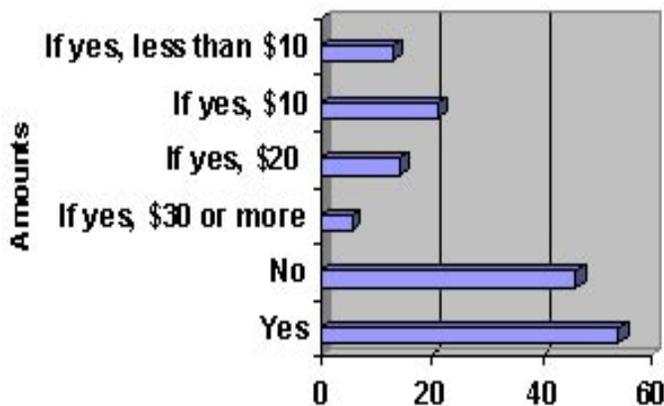


As shown in the accompanying chart, the largest group was those who had experienced flooding problems (21.4 percent), followed in turn by loss of drinking water service (15.4), recreation limitations (11.7), sewage problems (10.8) and acid mine drainage (4.0).

IV. Funding for Water and Sewer Services in PA...Will You Pay More?

Surprisingly, clear majorities thought the amount they were paying for drinking water services was reasonable or better, and were willing to pay more per month to improve water and sewer quality. A total of 59.1 percent thought what they paid currently was either low (10.1 percent) or reasonable (49.0 percent), while 16.8 percent thought rates were high. The survey also showed that water for 17.8 percent of those responding came from wells and 3.1 percent were renters.

Would You Pay More for Improved Water and Better Water and Sewer Management?



Respondents also agreed with the statement that more funds should be made available to maintain and upgrade PA water and sewer systems (80.1 percent agreed – 45.3 percent strongly and 34.8 percent somewhat). Only 3.9 percent disagreed strongly while 9.5 percent were unsure.

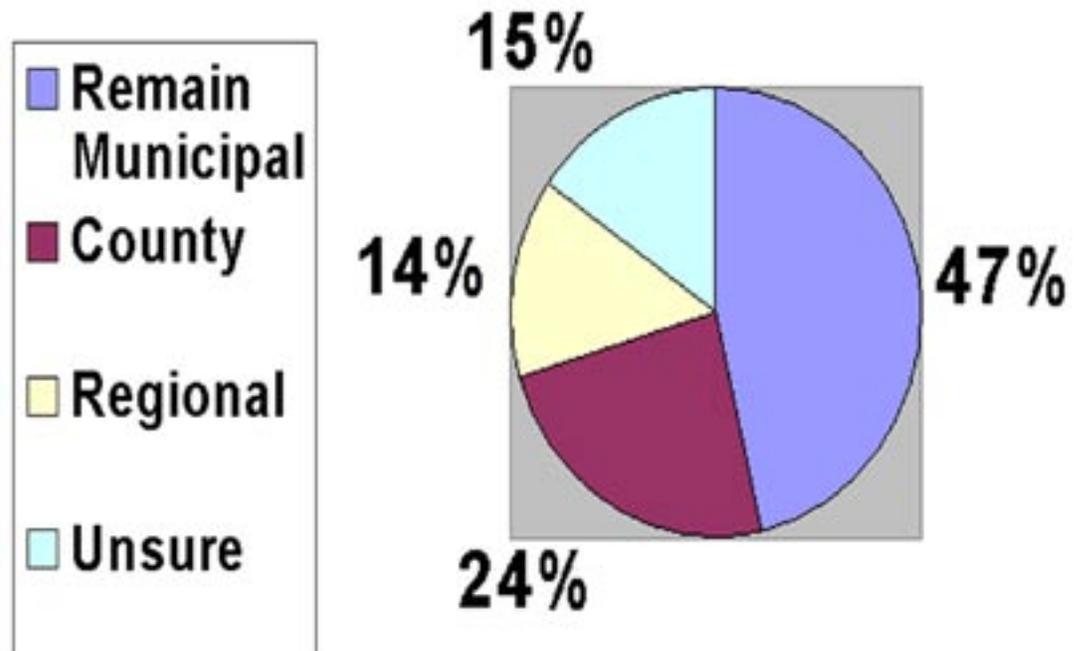
V. Governance and Planning for Water and Sewer Systems

Responses to the questions of what level of government should have authority to manage water and sewer systems in Pennsylvania and the willingness to create a fund to carry out water and sewer planning produced some seemingly contradictory responses. While the largest plurality of individuals (46.4 percent) wanted management authority to stay at the municipal government level, as opposed to the county (24 percent) or regional (14.4 percent) level, 75.7 percent of those responding were willing to give a regional entity up to \$1 per resident, per year to fund water and sewer planning.

Further, a smaller majority (56.4 percent) favored allowing a regional entity the authority to influence land use decisions (such as planning for construction of new homes and businesses) currently being made by municipal governments.

In what is perhaps a reflection of some uncertainty on the issue, identical responses of 15.2 percent of those surveyed were unsure as to what level of government they preferred to handle water and sewer management and also whether or not regional entities should be able to make land use decisions.

Where Should Authority to Manage Water and Sewer Systems Lie?



The Mansfield State Survey

The Mansfield State Survey is an annual statewide telephone survey, begun in 1990, of randomly selected Pennsylvania adults, which focuses upon issues facing the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The Committee has sponsored a series of environmental questions for a number of years.

A total of 920 Pennsylvanians were contacted for the 2007 survey. Respondents are proportionately represented in terms of geographical regions, sex and political party preference within the state to ensure an accurate sample. The margin of error in the 2007 survey is plus or minus 3.2 percent.

The 2007 survey was conducted under the direction of Mansfield University Professor of Sociology Dr. Timothy Madigan, PhD.

ON THE HORIZON . . .

A LOOK AT UPCOMING EVENTS

There are no upcoming events scheduled at this time.

COMMITTEE CHRONICLES . . .

REVIEW OF SOME MEMORABLE
COMMITTEE EVENTS

In March, Terry Miller, Director of the University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics, and D. Tyler "Ty" Gourley, Project Manager for the Regional Water Management Task Force spoke at the Joint Legislative Conservation Committee's (Committee) Environmental Issues Forum about their work with the task force and the task force goals and progress .



The Regional Water Management Task Force is an 11-county effort to improve regional cooperation in addressing SW PA's water and sewer challenges.

In the photo at left, Ty Gourley explains the structure and methodology of the task force.

At right, Terry Miller entertains a question from the forum audience regarding the task force's work.



After the forum, Miller and Gourley joined in a lively discussion with Committee Chair Rep. Scott Hutchinson (left), Committee member Rep. Tom Petrone (2nd from right), who also serves on one of the task force's committees, and Committee Vice-chair Sen. Raphael Musto (far right).

The Committee's statewide survey found some basic facts, as described in more detail in the survey results on pages 3-6. First, most Pennsylvanians were pretty pleased with the quality of their water. More than 90 percent thought it was very important to have clean water in Pennsylvania's rivers and streams. Believe it or not, more than 82 percent strongly linked water issues to the commonwealth's economic competitiveness, and nearly 96 percent thought the two were at least somewhat related. That is a fairly sophisticated understanding of a connection that is often overlooked.

The regional task force's responses to these questions were strikingly similar, varying only in magnitude. A smaller majority, but still a clear majority, (64.5 percent versus 72.4 percent) rated their water quality as excellent or good, and one-third of the folks responding to the task force survey considered their water fair or poor (it was one-fourth in the Committee survey). In nearly identical margins, respondents made the connection between water issues and economic competitiveness.

Both surveys found that by and large both Pennsylvanians and Southwest Pennsylvanians did not consider the rates they pay for drinking water services to be exorbitant. In the Committee's survey, 59.1 percent thought the rates were reasonable or low, while in the SW PA survey, three-quarters felt rates were reasonable or low. In a surprise, majorities on both surveys said they would be willing to pay more per month for improvements to their communities' water quality and water and sewer management. The majorities ranged from 53.9 percent on the statewide survey to 64.2 percent on the regional survey. And, in another funding question, 80 percent in the Committee survey (85.5 in the regional poll), agreed with the statement that more public funds should be made available to maintain and upgrade Pennsylvania's water and sewage systems.

A question regarding reliability of water and sewer systems found some differences. Statewide, two-thirds of those responding gave their water and sewage systems "very reliable" ratings. In SW PA, "very reliable" got responses of between 42 and 45 percent. Statewide, individuals reported "occasional problems" one-fourth of the time, while that number was around 46 percent on the regional survey. Serious problems were listed 4.6 percent of the time statewide and ranged from 7.7 percent to 11.4 percent regionally with more serious problems being reported in regard to sewer systems.

Creating a regional entity (as opposed to municipal entities) to oversee water and sewer management received a lukewarm response - a minority on the Committee survey and a small plurality on the regional survey. Ironically, however, both surveys found that there was strong support for providing a regional authority with \$1 per person, per year to carry out water and sewer planning (75 percent in both surveys). There was also support for giving a regional authority power to influence land use decisions currently being made by local municipalities (54 and 56 percent majorities). While a regional authority may not be preferred for water and sewer management, there appears to be acceptance of a regional approach to planning - at least at the price of \$1 per person, per year - and of land use decision-making.

I invite you to check out the complete results on pages 3 - 6. The Committee was pleased to work once again with Mansfield University and to share results with the Regional Water Management Task Force, whose principals were recent guest speakers at one of the Committee's Environmental Issues Forums (see Committee Chronicles on page 7 for some photos of the forum).

Southwest Pennsylvania is no different from other parts of the state in the challenges it is facing in regard to water and sewer infrastructure maintenance and quality. The Committee is conducting an ongoing study of sewer infrastructure needs statewide through its Sewage Task Force and will continue to share findings and information with the regional task force in order to resolve problems and create solutions.

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