



2022 Suburban Philadelphia Surface Water Survey

OVERVIEW: The following key findings are drawn from a survey of adult residents of suburban Philadelphia conducted by the Muhlenberg College Institute of Public Opinion during the summer of 2022. The telephone survey of 451 individuals residing in Bucks, Chester, Delaware or Montgomery counties measured resident perceptions of a variety of issues related to the rivers, streams and creeks in the region.

TARGET AUDIENCE: The survey was designed to provide high-quality information to the residents of local communities, municipal government officials and watershed organization leaders, in order to enhance informed, data driven policy development in southeastern Pennsylvania.

KEY FINDINGS:

1. A solid majority of residents of suburban Philadelphia express a familiarity with the rivers stream and creeks that are located within their county of residence.
2. About 7 in 10 adults in suburban Philadelphia believe that the region's waterways are "very important" to the overall quality of life in their county.
3. Nearly 3 out of 4 residents of suburban Philadelphia counties have engaged in walks, hikes or picnics along local waterways, with about 1 in 3 paddling, swimming or fishing in a stream, creek or river in their county.
4. Suburban Philadelphia residents are fairly divided on the health of waterways in their counties, with half rating water quality as "excellent" or "good," and half indicating local waterway health is either "fair" or "poor."
5. About 3 quarters of the residents of suburban Philadelphia are concerned about the condition of the waterways in their county, with 1 in 4 "very concerned" about the health of local rivers, streams and creeks.
6. Survey respondents identified a number of factors as major threats to the health of local waterways, with untreated sewage and industrial waste most commonly cited as factors that undermine surface waters in their county.

7. Over 2 out of 3 residents living in a suburban Philadelphia County agree that climate change is making flooding on local waterways more common.
8. A large majority of suburban Philadelphia residents do not believe that local waterways have already received adequate protection from local governments.
9. Just under half of survey respondents reported that they are not familiar with the concept of stormwater management.
10. About 6 out of 10 residents of suburban Philadelphia agree that protecting the rivers, streams and creeks in their county requires citizens to provide increased financial support.

SUGGESTED MESSAGING INFORMED BY SURVEY RESULTS:

1. Residents of suburban Philadelphia have interacted with their local waterways, recognize the importance of these environmental assets, and have significant concern about the future of the rivers, streams and creeks in their counties. Messaging about the ongoing risks to these valued community resources is likely to reinforce and expand public support for protective measures.
2. Reinforce existing public concern about specific threats to waterways such as industrial discharges, chemical releases and untreated sewage. This messaging may increase saliency of existing resident concerns.
3. As messaging is developed and executed, include references to the aspects of waterways that residents of the region find most important. These factors include providing habitat for fish and wildlife, and providing a source for drinking water for local communities.
4. With a large portion of local residents unfamiliar with storm water management, look for opportunities to connect existing concerns regarding waterways with education about the role stormwater management plays in protecting these valued resources.