Background of Public Attitudes Survey

Elements of a survey used to assess public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes, and actions toward water quality include:

- 57 questions, adapted from a similar survey used in the Pacific Northwest.
- One version was sent to randomly selected residents in Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada. 1760 were returned for an average 51% return rate.
- Another, slightly modified version was conducted orally with residents of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau. 303 surveys were completed.
- Data from the six island entities have been pooled for a “Pacific Island” perspective.
- All surveys were conducted from August 2003 to July 2004.
- The collected data were analyzed using the SAS procedure at the University of Idaho, and have a sampling error of +/- 5 percent.
- Survey questions were divided into six sections:
  - How Do You Feel About the Environment?
  - Your Environmental Perspective
  - Water Quality Education
  - Water Quality Information
  - Demographics

Because some questions were modified to address specific issues of the Pacific Islands, and data collection was conducted orally, there are limitations to combining the results with the states for a clearer regional perspective. However, overall trends apparent in both surveys do give a clear regional perspective on some issues.

Drinking Water Ranked as Most Important Issue

Clean drinking water is the most important water issue in each state and island of the region, according to the survey.

When asked to rank five competing water uses in order from most to least important, respondents in each state/island chose drinking water/human use as the clear top choice and recreation as the bottom choice while the rankings for the intermediate uses varied by location (Figure 1). Survey respondents also rated the importance of eleven water issues (ten in the Islands) as not important, somewhat important, no opinion, very important, or extremely important. Clean drinking water again receives top ratings with 100% of Pacific Island respondents ranking it either very or extremely important. Clean drinking water again receives top ratings with 100% of Pacific Island respondents ranking it either very or extremely important. The same combination yielded 99% in AZ, CA, and NV, and 98% in HI. Other highly rated issues:

- water for household/private sector
- clean groundwater
- clean rivers
- water for agriculture.

Do You Know What a Watershed is?

Yes! Agricultural workers in the states are more likely than the general population to have said yes, they do know what a watershed is. Seventy-four percent of the general population knows about watersheds while 93% of agricultural workers indicated the same.

The same question asked in the islands drew a different response. Likely due to language and cultural differences, the term watershed is not as well known among the general public or agricultural workers with positive responses from 48 and 3%, respectively.

When asked how aware they are of how watershed management affects water quality, between 51 and 54% (varying by state) of the general public indicated they were either somewhat or very aware. Again, the agricultural sector was more aware of this issue, with 83% at least somewhat aware. Island residents were less aware with 56% of the general population (ranging by island from 31 to 60%) and 45% of the agricultural sector at least somewhat aware of how watershed management affects water quality.

Where Do They Get Their Information?

When asked whether or not they have received water quality information from eight (nine in the islands) different sources, the most common sources of information were:

- newspapers
- television
- environmental agencies (government)
- environmental groups (citizen groups)

Survey recipients were asked how they viewed themselves on environmental issues on a scale from 1 to 10. A value of 1 indicates that all natural resources are fairly consistent in who they believe should be responsible for water quality.

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