



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

# Pacific Northwest

## Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA CSREES  
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

Fall 2007  
PNWWATER 121

### Citizens Take Action:

## Addressing Water Quality and Water Quantity Issues in the Pacific Northwest

This newsletter highlights actions that residents of the Pacific Northwest have taken in the last five years (since 2002) to address both water quality and water quantity issues. We collected this information through our 2007 Water Issues Survey sent to residents of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. The purpose of the survey was to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes, and actions taken toward water resource issues. This statistically designed survey was administered by mail to over 1,800 residents in the region in 2007. We achieved a response rate of over 50 percent, resulting in a sampling error of less than 4 percent.



#### **Actions taken to address water quality:**

A majority of Pacific Northwest residents have addressed water quality issues since 2002 by taking individual actions (Table 1). Over 46 percent of survey respondents have changed how they dispose of household wastes. This includes disposing of yard wastes at a composting facility or through special trash pick-ups, and disposing of hazardous wastes at special collection events instead of dumping these chemicals down the drain or placing them in the regular trash. Another 31 percent of residents have changed the amounts of or how they use pesticides and fertilizers in their yards. Over 29 percent of survey respondents are now disposing of used motor oil in a more water quality friendly manner than they were in 2002. Only about a quarter (26.2 percent) of survey respondents indicated that they have not taken individual action in the last five years to address water quality.

**Table 1. Actions taken by residents in the Pacific Northwest since 2002 (last five years) to address water quality issues.**

Information source	Percent citing
Changed methods of home waste disposal	46.1
Changed use of fertilizers/pesticides in yard	31.0
Changed disposal of motor oil	29.1
No actions taken	26.2

The demographic factor of age had an effect on how people addressed water quality issues since 2002. Residents between the ages of 30 and 70 were much more likely to change household waste disposal methods and the way pesticides and fertilizers were used in yards than respondents younger than 30 or older than 70. Respondents less than 30 years old were also less likely to change how they dispose of motor oil. In fact, 45 percent of respondents less than 30 years old indicated that they have taken no actions to address water quality issues in the last five years. This is in stark contrast to other age groups where at least two-thirds of respondents have made lifestyle changes to address water quality.



**Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners**

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**Water Resource Research Institutes**

Water and Environmental Research Center (Alaska)

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Idaho Water Resources Research Institute

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Institute for Water and Watersheds (Oregon)

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State of Washington Water Research Center

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**Environmental Protection Agency**

EPA, Region 10  
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**Actions taken to address water quantity:**

Over 80 percent of the region's adults have made lifestyle changes in the last five years to address water quantity issues (Table 2). A majority of residents (58.8 percent) have installed or used a water saving appliance in their residence since 2002. Another 46 percent reported that they have changed how they use water in their yard. Almost 43 percent of those surveyed reported changes in household water use in this five-year time period. Almost one-third of residents have reduced the amount of water used when washing their vehicles. Conversely, only 17.5 percent of people surveyed have not taken any actions to reduce water use since 2002.

**Table 2. Actions taken by residents in the Pacific Northwest since 2002 (last five years) to address water quantity issues.**

Action taken	Percent citing
Installed water-saving appliance	58.8
Changed yard watering	46.0
Changed household water use	42.9
Changed how motor vehicles are washed	30.0
No actions taken	17.5

The demographic factors of age, state of residence, and community size impacted how water use has changed in the last five years. For instance, residents of Alaska were less likely to have installed a water-saving device or reduced water usage in their yard than people in Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Residents in communities larger than 25,000 were more likely to have reduced home water usage than people in smaller communities. Finally, it appears that citizens between the ages of 40 and 50 are the most likely to be involved in water conservation efforts.

The results presented above are important because they document that the majority of adults in the Pacific Northwest have taken positive actions to address both water quality and water quantity issues in the last five years.



**National Water Quality Program Areas**

The four land grant universities in the Pacific Northwest have aligned our water resource extension and research efforts with eight themes of the USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension System.

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Animal Waste Management           | 5. Pollution Assessment and Prevention |
| 2. Drinking Water and Human Health   | 6. Watershed Management                |
| 3. Environmental Restoration         | 7. Water Conservation and Management   |
| 4. Nutrient and Pesticide Management | 8. Water Policy and Economics          |

*CSREES is the Cooperative States Research, Education, and Extension Service, a sub-agency of the United States Department of Agriculture, and is the federal partner in this water quality program.*