



Applying knowledge to improve water quality

Pacific Northwest

Regional Water Program

A Partnership of USDA NIFA
& Land Grant Colleges and Universities

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PNWWATER 020

Sources of Water Quality Information

Television and newspapers are the most frequently cited sources of water information by citizens of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Newspapers were cited by 68 percent of survey respondents as a source of water information (Table 1). Another 59 percent of survey respondents reported that they had received water information from television. Environmental agencies and environmental organizations have provided water information to 51 and 46 percent of the public in the Pacific Northwest, respectively. Over a quarter of survey respondents reported that they have received water information from the Extension Service associated with the region's land grant universities. Universities and schools were cited by 25 and 20 percent of the public as water information sources, respectively. From an educational standpoint, newspapers are probably a better source of water information compared to television. This is due to the fact that reading a newspaper is an active learning process compared to the relatively passive process of watching television.



Table 1. Sources of water quality information for citizens of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington.

Information source	% receiving information
Newspapers	68
Television	59
Environmental agencies	51
Environmental groups	46
Extension	28
Universities	25
Schools	20



The PNW Water Survey

A 50-question survey was developed by the Pacific Northwest water quality team to document public awareness, aptitudes, attitudes and actions toward water quality in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Demographic data about the survey respondents were also collected. This statistically designed survey was completed by over 50 percent of the 1,800 residents who were solicited for this study in 2002. As part of the water awareness portion of the survey, residents were asked the source(s) of their water information. The sampling error of this survey question was +/- 3 percent.



Pacific Northwest Regional Water Quality Coordination Project Partners

Land Grant Universities

Alaska

Cooperative Extension Service

Contact Fred Sorensen:

907-786-6311

<http://www.uaf.edu/ces/water/>

University Publications:

<http://www.alaska.edu/uaf/ces/publications/>

Idaho

University of Idaho

Cooperative Extension System

Contact Bob Mahler: 208-885-7025

<http://www.uidaho.edu/wq/wqhome.html>

University Publications:

<http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/Catalog/catalog.htm>

Oregon

Oregon State University

Extension Service

Contact Mike Gamroth: 541-737-3316

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/>

Washington

Washington State University

WSU Extension

Contact Bob Simmons:

360-427-9670 ext. 690

<http://wawater.wsu.edu/>

University Publications:

<http://pubs.wsu.edu/>

Northwest Indian College

Contact Charlotte Clausing:

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Water Resource Research Institutes

Water and Environmental Research

Center (Alaska)

<http://www.uaf.edu/water/>

Idaho Water Resources

Research Institute

<http://www.boise.uidaho.edu/>

Institute for Water and

Watersheds (Oregon)

<http://water.oregonstate.edu/>

State of Washington

Water Research Center

<http://www.swwrc.wsu.edu/>

Environmental Protection Agency

EPA, Region 10

The Pacific Northwest

<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>

Office of Research and Development,

Corvallis Laboratory

<http://www.epa.gov/wed/>

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The age of Pacific Northwest residents impacted the type of water information sources they were most often exposed to. For instance people over 50 years old were much more likely to obtain water information from Extension than people younger than 50 (Table 2). Older citizens were also more likely to obtain water information from newspapers and/or environmental agencies than younger people.

Table 2. Impact of citizen age on source of water quality information source for citizens of the Pacific Northwest.

Source	Age in years			
	< 30 (%)	30-49 (%)	50-65 (%)	> 69 (%)
Television	62	52	62	70
Newspapers	61	62	73	79
Extension	16	22	35	35
Environmental agencies	43	48	52	57

The state of residence also had an impact on the water information source (Table 3). Residents of Alaska were more likely to obtain water information from environmental agencies than residents of Idaho, Oregon or Washington. People in Oregon tended to receive more water-related information from environmental groups than residents of the other three states. Extension reached a greater percentage of Alaska residents with water information than Idaho, Oregon or Washington.

Table 3. The impact of state of residence on sources of water quality information.

Source	State of residence			
	AK (%)	ID (%)	OR (%)	WA (%)
Environmental agencies	64	42	49	51
Environmental groups	44	33	52	47
Extension	38	28	30	24

Although Extension does not have the consumer reach that newspapers and television have, it is an important source of water information in smaller communities (Table 4). In fact 42 percent of residents in communities that have less than 7,000 residents have used Extension as a source of water information.

Table 4. The impact of community size on source of water quality information for citizens of the Pacific Northwest.

Source	Community size			
	> 100,000 (%)	25-100,000 (%)	7-25,000 (%)	< 7,000 (%)
Newspapers	69	70	74	57
Extension	25	23	29	42

The data presented in this update shows that people in the Pacific Northwest obtain information about water quality and water resources from a variety of sources. Future educational programs about water should consider many of the sources shown above as potential outlets to make their programs more effective.