

Drinking Water Policy

attitudes and perception are key

Simon Fraser University



SFU
RESEARCH
MATTERS

BC Water Facts

- 3300 water systems in BC.
- 90% of population served by 96 systems.
- 10% of population served by 3236 systems.
- Approximately 63 000 private wells.
- 304 boil water advisories in effect in August 2001.

(BC Gov't Action plan for Safe Drinking Water, 2002)



Study to date:

- Survey first piloted at the University of Calgary in the spring of 2003, students surveyed on their uses of bottled water.
- Survey refined and conducted at Simon Fraser University in the summer 2003.
- In the fall 2003 over 1000 surveys conducted by SFU students as part of a Communications Policy & Research Methods course.
- In March of 2004, the results from the survey as well as an interactive poster were presented at the Applied Sciences Institute Exchange 2004.

What we found.

Mixed messages

Chart 1A: Vancouver survey-% that would drink tap water in:

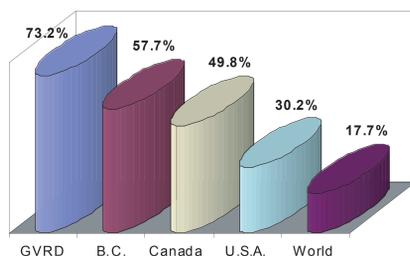
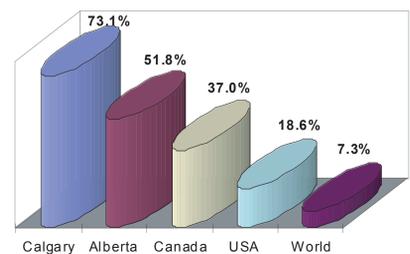


Chart 1B: Calgary survey-% that would drink tap water in:

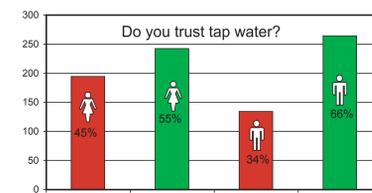


Charts 1A & B illustrate that the further one gets from their place of residence, the less likely they are to drink tap water. Since 73% would drink tap water in the GVRD and in Calgary, this could infer that there is a high degree of satisfaction with these water systems, indeed, 3/4 of the Vancouver group trust tap water in general; however 65% of these use filtered or bottled water at home. **Why?**

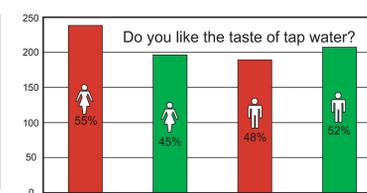
Different Sex, different Attitudes about water

Surveyors also observed the apparent age, and gender of respondents. When these factors were considered, we found slight variations among age groups but more significant differences between males and females.

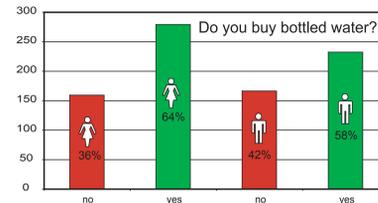
Gender & Trust



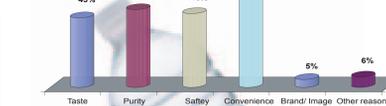
Gender & Taste



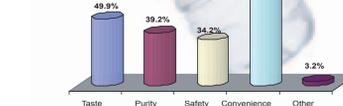
Gender & Small bottles



Why buy? - Vancouver



Why buy? - Calgary



Is there a policy-perception-disconnect?

The majority of BC residents trust and like the taste of their tap water, and yet the majority surveyed also filter or buy bottled water.

Why?

As it turns out, 65% of the BC residents surveyed buy bottled water for convenience, but high numbers (40%+) said they buy water for concerns of safety, taste and purity. The Calgary survey had similar results, but with even higher numbers buying bottled water for convenience (71.7%) and taste (49.9%).

Do these facts suggest that people have lost faith in the supply? Also if people are turning to bottled and filtered water, despite the tested safety of the municipal supply, should all water be treated for drinking purposes or should water treatment responsibility trickle down to the end user?

How Much Water Do We Need?

UNESCO's basic water requirement is around 50 litres per day

http://www.unesco.org/science/wci/meetings/eur_pari_water_98.htm

The average consumption in the GVRD is over 300 litres per capita per day <http://www.nsnnews.com/issues03/w072703/075103/news/075103m2.html>

In the developing world the average person uses 10 litres per day.

<http://www.unep.org/wed/2003/keyfacts.htm>

Where Does all our water go?

Clothes Washers-23% Faucets-14% Showers-14%
Toilets-30% Leaks-10% Baths-6% Dishwashers-2%
Other-1%

<http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/water/residential-conservation-initiatives.htm>



Policy Issues

- Is water a human right, a public good, a commodity or three?
- Canadian water systems deliver cheap, almost unlimited supplies of water, with minimal treatment (usually simple filtration and chlorination, is this method sustainable?)
- The policy environment post-Walkerton is changing rapidly and most provinces are now introducing higher standards.
- New drinking water policies have laid higher levels of responsibility on small water system operators/purveyors raising issues of costs, liability and control.

The Future of Water Delivery

- A) Continue to treat all the water that flow to users
- All water is safe; and safe water is a public good

BUT

- Need to examine how to reduce consumption
- Need major capital spending on existing systems and in new alternative technologies

- B) Do not deliver potable water, but use point of use treatment or alternative delivery systems (eg bottled water)
- Water becomes a commodity.
 - Water is treated as required.

BUT

- Will the public accept the delivery of non-potable water?
- What are public attitudes towards the use of bottled water?
- Could municipalities sell and bottle their own water?
- Is water a lifestyle issue?

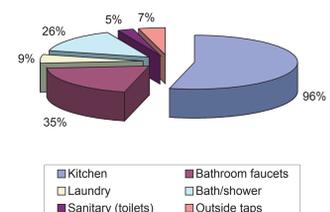
- C) Permit variable delivery systems within jurisdictions:

BUT

- Allows flexibility in policy making and system spending
- Will the public accept private delivery of potable water?
- If under 20% of water coming to a house is used for drinking, then should a separate drinking water line be run? where do you want potable water?

Retrofit

Retrofitting large urban centers with a separate water line may seem like a non-starter, but water is big business. Telecom deregulation showed that new entrants were willing to run their own cable and there is major corporate interest in the water beyond bottling it.



Water News

Vancouver Tap Water on Top:
In a blind taste test 40% liked tap best, while 33% liked RO filtered water, followed closely by 27% that liked the taste of spring water.

SFU survey finds mixed attitudes about drinking water
Toronto Star, September 5, 2001 by Royson James

Thirsting for Justice Share Lent organizers want water recognized as a basic human right
The BC Catholic, March 29, 2004

If the water is in a bottle, they will buy
Toronto Star, September 5, 2001 by Royson James

Council asked to pay \$50,000 to tell us our tap water is safe
insidetoronto.ca, February 6, 2004 by David Nickle

Come to Chilliwack for the water
The Province, February 25, 2004

Coke selling London tap water?
The Province, Tuesday March 2, 2004

Coke in your faucet
The Progressive, August 2001, by Sonia Shah