

Surveys

Conducting surveys of how the public perceives storm water management and their concerns can foster better planning and management programs. The results of these attitude surveys can enlighten both storm water managers and the public on the sources of pollution, the effects of storm water on the environment, and options for control. Program planners can use this information to determine how best to incorporate the public's needs and desires.

One of the benefits of conducting a public attitude survey is to find out what people really think about an issue instead of assuming municipal staff already knows. It also allows a person not normally involved in an issue to voice an opinion. Attitude surveys are also helpful in targeting public education, awareness, and information programs. By understanding what the public perceives and wants, a municipality can better implement storm water management in the community, and better plan for upcoming years.

Determine who should be surveyed

People who could be surveyed include the residents of particular communities, local business owners, schoolchildren, and other groups. Surveys should be tailored to the municipality's various population segments to account for demographic shifts by age, ethnicity, and income. This may require several types of surveys and languages to ascertain true attitudes.

Determine how to survey

People could be surveyed by mailing each individual a paper survey to complete and return. They can also be interviewed at strategic locations throughout the community, such as the library, grocery or mall. Telephone surveys can be conducted. Be careful about using only electronic surveys on the internet as not everyone has internet access nor is everyone computer literate. In some cases, one survey may not be sufficient. As cities change, surveys may need to be updated periodically.

What questions should be asked?

A municipality can determine what information it needs to know by addressing the following questions:

- Have citizens complained about new restrictions caused by the storm water program?
- Do people understand the definition and impacts of storm water?
- Is the municipality about to raise sewer rates (as a result of the storm water regulations)?

Some other water resource issues that can be queried about in surveys include:

- Agricultural activities
- Forestry management
- Changes in hydrology
- Recreation
- Public needs
- Property rights
- Sources of pollution
- Present and past water quality
- Wetlands

EPA provides survey help in [Community Culture and the Environment - Understanding a Sense of Place](#) (USEPA EPA 842-B-01-003,2002)

Compiling and analyzing the results

To be able to compile and analyze survey results, care must be taken to consider the questions asked and the form in which they are asked. You may wish to hire a firm that specializes in surveys, either to administer it, or simply as a consultant on its design. In addition, it is important to set specific dates for the survey and to give enough time for the public to respond. You may also want to explore partnerships with colleges to enlist a class for assistance with surveys.

Survey results

Publish the results in a format that allows the community to see the results. Results can be used in outreach materials and in the municipality's annual report, hopefully showing improvement over time. Results may be used to develop plans to manage storm water more effectively.

Costs

The costs associated with an attitude survey depend on its type. A survey mailed to every resident of a county, for example, would be more expensive than a survey sent to a randomly selected sample. Adding surveys to utility mailings can cut the postage costs if that is a limitation. Furthermore, if the surveys to be returned are pre-postage-paid, the cost is greater. Without controlling repeat responses or responses from non-stakeholders, statistical validity may be questionable. It is available to anonymously link a survey response to a street address, allowing for only one response per address. This of course requires higher level of internet capability by the surveyor. Money saved on mailings could be put toward developing the proper online survey. A survey could also be downloaded from the internet and mailed in or dropped off at local offices.

For more information, see EPA's Community Hotline website at
[http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/stormwater/menuofbmps/invol_2.cfm]