

SAN MATEO COUNTYWIDE STORMWATER POLLUTION PREVENTION PROGRAM

**2001 RESIDENTIAL
PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY
(SAMPLE SIZE N=400)**

FINAL SUMMARY REPORT

JUNE 2001

FAIRBANK, MASLIN, MAULLIN & ASSOCIATES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS.

- A. Knowledge of Pollution Sources.....
- B. Perceptions of Water Treatment and Disposal.....
- C. Assessment of Parties Responsible for Improving Water Quality.....
- D. Resident Actions to Reduce Pollution.....
- E. Sources of Information on the Proper Disposal of Pollutants.....
- F. Effect of Messages Regarding the Proper Disposal of Pollutants
- G. Observation of Storm Drain Stencils
- H. Awareness and Use of Toll-Free Numbers and Websites.....
- I. Use of Products Containing Mercury and Understanding of Their Dangers.....

APPENDIX A: TARGETING TABLE.....

APPENDIX B: TOPLINE SURVEY RESULTS.....

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Introduction

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (FMM&A) recently conducted a public opinion survey of 400 randomly-selected adult San Mateo County residents to assess their understanding of issues related to stormwater pollution in the county. The survey followed a 1996 study, conducted by another research firm, which established county residents' baseline attitudes and awareness on issues relating to stormwater pollution. The primary goal of the 2001 survey was to detect any changes in public perceptions over the past five years as a result of public education efforts undertaken by the County, as well as by other agencies concerned with stormwater pollution). This report summarizes the results of the survey, and presents conclusions and recommendations based on those results.

The margin of sampling error for the sample as a whole is ± 4.9 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups within the survey sample will be higher; for example, the margin of error for male respondents (who make up 45 percent of the survey sample) would be ± 7.3 percent.

The survey was conducted by telephone between March 27 and 31, 2001, and took approximately ten minutes for the average respondent to complete. In order to maintain the comparability of survey results, the language and sequence of most survey questions were kept identical to those asked in the 1996 survey. Several new questions were added to the survey, but were ordered to minimize the potential bias resulting from the introduction of new information into the existing sequence of the survey. A Spanish-language version of the questionnaire was administered to those residents who preferred to respond in Spanish (about 11 percent of all respondents).

The survey data were weighted slightly to conform with Census data on the demographic composition of the county's population. The data were cross-tabulated and analyzed to identify any significant differences in attitudes and awareness among various subgroups of the sample.

The following sections contain an executive summary and a more detailed analysis of survey results, with recommendations. Topline survey results are presented in Appendix B. Complete print-outs of cross-tabulated data have already been submitted to the County.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. While county residents continue to rate “chemical waste from factories” as the most serious threat to the county’s waterways, **residents see “individuals dumping pollutants into storm drains” as somewhat less of a serious problem than was the case in 1996.** In 1996, 54 percent of those polled viewed such dumping by individuals as a “very serious threat” to county waterways, a proportion which fell to 37 percent in this year’s survey.
2. More than six out of ten respondents continue to understand that water from their kitchens and baths gets treated at a sewage treatment plant before running into creeks, the Bay and the ocean. On the other hand, a bare 51-percent majority of county residents understand that storm drains flow directly into creeks, the Bay and the ocean; this proportion remains unchanged from 1996. **Thus, while most residents understand how the County’s water is disposed of, there remain many residents who are unsure or have false impressions (particularly when it comes to the destination of water that flows through area storm drains).**
3. A 43-percent plurality of San Mateo County residents view “the government” as primarily responsible for improving water quality in San Mateo county waterways, while **just one in five residents (21 percent) say that “every resident” has responsibility for water quality.** Sixteen percent of those polled say that “business and industry” have most responsibility for improving water quality.
4. At the same time, **County residents do believe that there are actions that individuals can take to improve water quality.** As was the case in 1996, a plurality say that “disposing of materials properly” is the best way for individuals to reduce pollution of area waterways. An increased number of respondents in this year’s survey suggested that being more aware and more conscientious was the best way that residents could reduce water pollution.
5. As in 1996, **a plurality of respondents (31 percent) indicated that they would be most likely to turn to the garbage company for information on how to properly use and dispose of paint, household chemicals, and motor oil.** Local government agencies and the phone book were the next-most frequent responses. There was a significant increase in the proportion of respondents in this year’s survey who said they would visit a recycling center or a disposal site or consult the Internet to obtain such information.
6. **While most county residents say they have “seen, read or heard” something about proper use and disposal of household chemicals or motor oil, the proportion has dropped slightly since the study was conducted five years ago.** Just 64 percent of those polled remembered receiving such messages, down from 72 percent in 1996. As was the case in the baseline survey, garbage company fliers, television, and newspapers were the most

frequent sources of such messages; garbage company fliers were cited as sources somewhat more frequently than in the past, and newspapers somewhat less frequently.

7. **Approximately two-thirds of those respondents who received a message about the proper disposal of household chemicals or motor oil indicated that they had changed their behavior as a result.** A total of 18 percent said they had disposed of those materials properly as a result of the message they had heard and, an additional eleven percent said they were “more careful” after hearing the message. However, many respondents who had received messages about the proper disposal of household chemicals and motor oil reported that the messages had little effect on their behavior. Fully 33 percent of those who had received such messages said there was “no change” in the way they used and disposed of these products upon hearing the message.
8. **Nearly three-quarters of those polled said they had seen the “No Dumping, Flows to Bay” message stenciled above storm drains across the county, a proportion virtually identical to that observed in 1996.** Respondents who had seen the stencil were significantly more likely to understand that storm drains flow into area waterways.
9. **Only five percent of respondents said that they had called the 1-800-CLEANUP toll-free number, and only one in one hundred said they had called 1-800-BAYWISE or visited the www.STOPPP.net website.** These proportions have not changed significantly since 1996.
10. County residents purchase a variety of products that contain mercury, but the most frequently-purchased products include batteries (purchased within the last five years by 66 percent of those polled) and fluorescent lamps (bought by 32 percent of county residents). **Nearly all residents understand that thermometers contain mercury, and three out of five realize that thermostats and batteries do, but just one in three know that there is mercury in fluorescent lamps.**
11. **A clear plurality of residents say they dispose of products containing mercury by throwing them away, but when it was suggested that in the future they could recycle them curbside or dispose of them through a household hazardous waste program, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they would do so.**

12. While the survey results suggest that all residents of the County could benefit from further education regarding the dangers of stormwater pollution, the following demographic groups appear to be the most suitable targets for outreach (based on their current understanding of the storm drain system and their awareness of messages regarding the safe disposal of household chemicals and motor oil):

2 **Residents with relatively low levels of education or income**

2 **Women under age 45**

2 **Seniors (residents over age 65)**

2 **Renters**

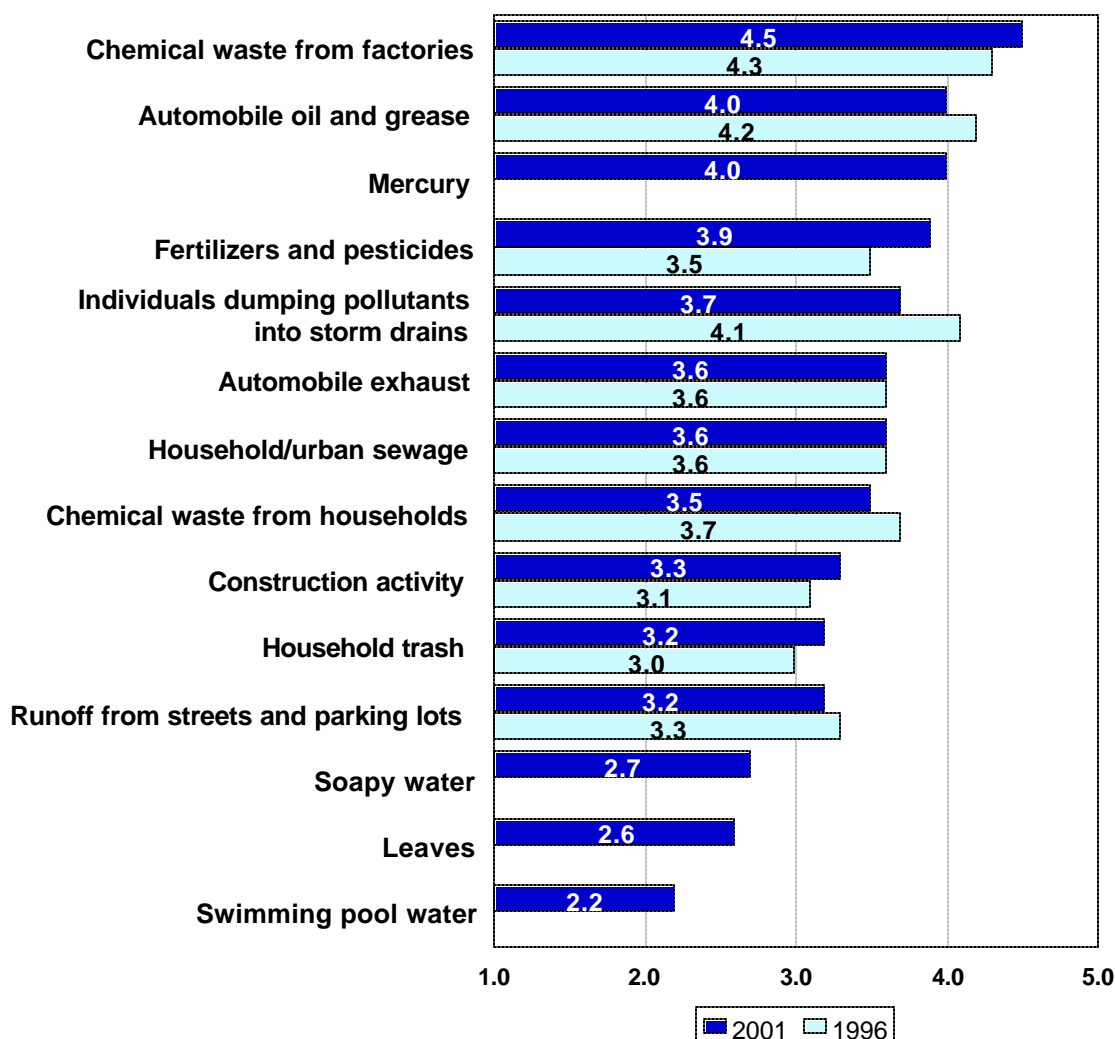
2 **Latinos** (especially those who prefer to speak Spanish)

ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

A. KNOWLEDGE OF POLLUTION SOURCES

As was the case in 1996, survey respondents were asked to rate the seriousness of a variety of threats to water quality in San Mateo County. Respondents were asked to rate each on a scale from one to five, where a rating of one represented “no threat” and a rating of five represented “a very serious threat.” The mean score that each item received in both 1996 and 2001 is presented below in **Figure 1**.

FIGURE 1:
EVALUATION OF THREATS TO SAN MATEO COUNTY WATERWAYS, 1996 AND 2001
(Mean Score on a Scale Where 1 = “No Threat” and 5 = “Very Serious Threat”)



Overall, as was the case in 1996, residents rate “chemical waste from factories” as the most serious threat to the County’s waterways. Factory waste received a mean score of 4.5 on the five-point scale, up from 4.3 in 1996. In fact, almost 6 out of 10 respondents gave “chemical waste from factories” the maximum score of five, a percentage that overshadows every item on the list. “Automobile oil and grease” was rated the second-most serious source of pollution (as it was in 1996), with a mean score of 4.0 and 44 percent of respondents assigning it a score of five. “Mercury,” an item added to the list for this year’s survey, also received a mean score of 4.0.

Overall, *women, Latinos and residents with relatively low levels of education and income* are most likely to view “chemical waste from factories” as a very serious threat to local waterways. Fully 77 percent of respondents in the lowest income bracket (\$25K and under) cite such waste as posing the most serious threat to San Mateo’s waterways while 65 percent of respondents with an income of \$25-50K believe this is the case. Fully 76 percent of the county’s Latino residents also share this view. Women, particularly those over 45, are also much more inclined than men to point to chemical waste from factories as a very serious threat, with 68 percent of all women and 72 percent of women over 45

responding in this way. Finally, 72 percent of respondents with a high school degree or less shared this perception.

Clearly, County residents continue to view point-source pollution as the most serious threat to local waterways. **On the other hand, the percentage of County residents who view “individuals dumping pollutants into storm drains” as a serious threat has dropped notably in the past five years.** This year the item received a mean score of 3.7 on the five-point scale, down from 4.1 in 1996. While more than half of those polled (54%) considered dumping in storm drains a “very serious threat” in 1996, only 37 percent shared that view this year. No other item on the list showed such a large drop in its score between surveys.

Those least likely to see “individuals dumping pollutants into storm drains” as a very serious threat include **men** (particularly non-white men and those under 45), **homeowners**, and **residents with a post-graduate education or annual household income over \$75,000**. The fact that relatively well-educated respondents are less likely than others to view individuals dumping pollutants in storm drains as a very serious threat is somewhat surprising, as is the finding (illustrated below in **Figure 2**) that those respondents who understand that storm drains flow directly to the Bay are no more likely than others to view dumping in storm drains as a very serious threat.

48. Are you employed full-time, part-time or something else? **(DO NOT READ LIST)**

Employed full-time-----	(ASK Q49) --57%
Employed part-time -----	(ASK Q49) --7%
Student-----	4%
Retired -----	17%
Homemaker-----	7%
Unemployed/disabled-----	5%
Self-employed -----	(ASK Q49) --2%
Artist-----	0%
Employed (general) -----	(ASK Q49) --0%
(OTHER – SPECIFY) _____	0%
(REFUSED/DK/NA) -----	1%

(ASK Q49 ONLY IF “EMPLOYED” IN Q48)

49. What is your present job or position? **(DO NOT READ LIST)**

Professional/technical -----	31%
Manager/executive -----	15%
Sales -----	9%
Skilled labor -----	6%
Unskilled labor/operators-----	7%
Service worker -----	6%
Military-----	0%
Government-----	4%
Unemployed -----	0%
Clerical-----	8%
Self-employed -----	3%
(OTHER – SPECIFY) _____	5%
(REFUSED/DK/NA) -----	4%

(RESUME ASKING ALL RESPONDENTS)

50. Please stop me when I reach the category that includes the age you will be on your next birthday.

18-24 -----	9%
25-34 -----	15%
35-44 -----	21%
45-54 -----	20%
55-64 -----	12%
65 and older-----	21%
(REFUSED/DK/NA) -----	2%

51. What is your ZIP Code? **(RECORD EXACT ZIP CODE BELOW AND THEN CODE AFTERWARD)**

Central area ZIP codes ----- 22%
North area ZIP codes ----- 38%
Coastside area ZIP codes ----- 2%
South area ZIP codes ----- 31%
(REFUSED/DK/NA) ----- 6%

52. Do you own or rent your place of residence?

Own ----- 64%
Rent ----- 33%
(OTHER – SPECIFY) ----- 0%
(REFUSED/DK/NA) ----- 2%

53. Please stop me when I reach a category that includes your total gross household income from last year? **(READ LIST)**

\$15,000 and under ----- 8%
\$15,001 - \$25,000 ----- 9%
\$25,001 - \$35,000 ----- 7%
\$35,001 - \$50,000 ----- 10%
\$50,001 - \$75,000 ----- 12%
More than \$75,000 ----- 31%
(DON'T READ) Refused ----- 23%

54. What do you consider to be your ethnic background? **(READ CATEGORIES)**

Caucasian ----- 45%
Hispanic ----- 18%
African-American ----- 4%
Filipino ----- 3%
Asian ----- 17%
American Indian/Eskimo ----- 0%
Multi-racial ----- 5%
OTHER(SPECIFY) ----- 3%
(DON'T READ) DK/NA/REFUSED ----- 5%

THAT CONCLUDES OUR CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION.

Gender: By observation

Male -----45%

Female -----55%

Language: By observation

English -----89%

Spanish -----11%

Name _____

Phone# _____

Interviewer _____

Date _____

Verified by _____

Zip Code _____

Rep # _____

Page # _____

