



A Partnership to Restore and Protect the Sound

The Long Island Sound Office

of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

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NEWS RELEASE

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Survey Reveals Long Island Sound Residents Not Fully Informed About Water Quality Issues

Stamford, CT, April 25, 2007—Long Island Sound residents care about the environment, but are not fully informed about the primary causes of pollution affecting the Sound, according to a government-sponsored survey released today.

The survey also revealed that residents who were more knowledgeable about environmental issues were more likely to behave in an environmentally responsible way leading to improved water quality for Long Island Sound.

The survey, of 1,220 residents who live within 15 miles of the shoreline, was conducted by the Center for Survey Research at Stony Brook University in spring 2006 for the Long Island Sound Study, a partnership of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the states of Connecticut and New York.

Residents show high levels of concern for the environment and support efforts to protect and restore it. About 73 percent of respondents said that protecting the environment was more important to them than encouraging economic growth. But for many, those attitudes are not linked to personal behaviors or accurate knowledge of the problems facing the Sound. About 17 percent of respondents knew how an excess amount of nitrogen is harming water quality in Long Island Sound. And less than half knew that sewage treatment plants and polluted runoff are the primary sources of nitrogen pollution to the Sound. Instead just as many people believe dumping of trash into the Sound or industrial plants are the primary sources of pollution.

The survey also suggested that people need a better understanding of basic water quality terms; for example, only about 20 percent knew that a watershed means a land area that drains into a specific body of water, and less than one-third knew that storm drains empty into the Sound and its tributaries.

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But the survey showed that people who were more environmentally knowledgeable were more likely to practice positive water quality behaviors. For example, residents who understood basic environmental concepts were more likely to engage in lawn care practices that prevent the runoff of excess fertilizer. Such activities could reduce nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous from discharging into tributaries and the Sound. Excess algae, stimulated by the nutrients, lead to lower levels of oxygenated waters, which harms the Sound's fish and shellfish.

"The survey results remind us of the real importance of Earth Day, which is to better understand the issues harming our environment so we can learn how to make a difference in improving it," said Mark Tedesco, director of the EPA Long Island Sound Office in Stamford.

"The findings reveal a large difference in public knowledge of air and water pollution," said Leonie Huddy, director of the Center for Survey Research at Stony Brook University. "Watershed residents are reasonably knowledgeable about car emissions and fossil fuels. But they are very poorly informed about the major causes of water pollution. Most people do not understand how their everyday behavior affects local water quality."

The survey also revealed that a majority—59 percent—participated in at least one recreational activity at the Sound in the previous summer with 30 percent participating in 3-5 activities. According to the survey, 79 percent of Long Island residents participated in at least one activity in the previous summer compared to 72 percent for Connecticut residents, 49 percent for Westchester residents, and 44 percent for Bronx and Queens residents. The primary activities of interest were passive, including shoreline activities such as sitting at the beach, having a picnic, or enjoying the view. These activities were followed in frequency of use by hiking or walking in natural areas, swimming, boating, and fishing. Proximity to the Sound was also related to usage of the Sound. Nearly 90 percent of people who lived within 10 minutes of the Sound said they took part in at least one activity.

In no region of the Sound did a majority express an opinion that water quality was good or excellent, that swimming was very safe, or eating fish and shellfish was very safe. However, the survey revealed that those who participated in a greater variety of activities at the Sound were more likely than others to rate the water quality positively and view it as having improved over the last five years.

"These results show that people value access to the Sound and enjoy its natural resources, even as they believe more needs to be done to restore it," said Tedesco.

The Long Island Sound Study, a National Estuary Program, is a cooperative effort created by EPA and the states of Connecticut and New York, involving researchers, regulators, user groups and other concerned organizations and individuals to protect and improve the health of the Sound. For more information about the Long Island Sound Study and the agreements reached today, visit www.longislandsoundstudy.net.

The Survey is available at the Long Island Sound Study Web site at www.longislandsoundstudy.net/lisspublicsurvey.