

For Immediate Release

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EIGHTY-SIX PERCENT OF AMERICANS HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THEIR HOME DRINKING WATER, NEW WQA SURVEY FINDS

Nearly Half Believe Federal Laws Regulating Drinking Water Aren't Strict Enough

CHICAGO (April 23, 2001) -- An overwhelming majority of Americans – 86 percent – have concerns about their home water supply – and nearly half believe federal laws governing the quality of drinking water are not strict enough, according to the fourth biennial National Consumer Water Quality Survey. Results of the 2001 survey, commissioned by the Water Quality Association, are being released in advance of National Drinking Water Week (May 6-12).

“This year’s survey reveals that Americans’ concerns about their home water are at an all time high, while their confidence in the federal laws designed to ensure safe drinking water is declining,” said Carlyn Meyer, WQA Public Affairs Director. In fact, the percentage of survey respondents who want stricter drinking water laws rose from 40 percent in 1999 to 49 percent in 2001.

This finding coincides with a recent Environmental Protection Agency order -- subsequently withdrawn pending further study – which would have lowered acceptable arsenic levels in drinking water by 80 percent (from 50 ppb to 10 ppb) within five years. “Our research

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shows Americans want more -- not less -- protection against drinking water contaminants. In fact, the survey found that more than 60 percent of people would be willing to pay more on their utility bill or for home water treatment to reduce arsenic if it was present in their water.” Meyer said.

The survey also showed that one in three Americans (32 percent) believes their water is not as safe as it should be, and one-half of adults are concerned about possible health contaminants in their water. Not surprisingly, the survey also found that parents of young children are especially concerned about the quality of their home water. In fact, 55 percent of parents with children under 12 said that becoming a parent caused them to have additional concerns about the quality or safety of their household tap water.

Knowledge of Contaminants High – Media Is The Source

Nearly 70 percent of Americans, according to the survey, said they were knowledgeable about contaminants in their water; yet they don’t appear to be obtaining their information from one of the most likely sources – federally-mandated water quality reports. Only 17 percent of respondents said they received and read their local water supplier’s water quality report (also called a Consumer Confidence Report), which provides an overview of contaminant levels present in an area’s water supply. (The 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act required every public water supplier to distribute annual water quality reports to their customers beginning in 1999.) Instead, the media was the most frequently cited source of information about home water contaminants.

41 Percent Use Water Treatment Devices

Amidst heightened concerns, more Americans are taking individual responsibility for the quality of their own home drinking water, Meyer noted. Use of home water treatment devices remains high at 41 percent (up from 38 percent in 1999 and 32 percent in 1997).

Demographic groups reporting the highest usage of water treatment devices included adults ages 35-44 (47 percent), families with children under 12 (45 percent) and college graduates (50 percent). Bottled water use remained steady at 39 percent, according to the survey.

“As concerns and awareness of water quality issues rise – more people are turning to home water treatment systems as an effective and economical means of ensuring high-quality home water,” Meyer said. Respondents were evenly split over why they drink filtered water -- 43 percent said filtered water tastes better while 42 percent said it is safer.

Satisfaction with home water treatment systems is high, the survey indicated, with 95 percent of respondents who use water treatment systems reporting they were satisfied with the effectiveness of their systems.

Additionally, one out of 10 adults who does not use a water filtration unit now intends to purchase one within the next year, and 55 percent of respondents said they would be more likely to buy a house with a water treatment device if they were in the market for a new home.

The 2001 National Consumer Water Quality Survey of 1,021 adults was conducted in February 2001 by Opinion Research Corporation International, an independent research firm based in Princeton, NJ.

The Water Quality Association is an international trade association representing retailers, dealers, manufacturers and suppliers in the household, commercial, industrial and small system water treatment industry. For more information about home water treatment issues, from an interactive search engine that helps “diagnose” contaminants in water to an overview of water treatment technologies and their capabilities, visit the WQA Web site at www.wqa.org.

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