



Water Quality Public Opinion Survey- Sault Ste. Marie Drinking Water System

Summary of Findings

Key Findings:

The issue of municipal drinking water, while not top of mind among residents, is a prominent issue that residents want city leaders to address. On an unaided basis, only 3% specifically mention drinking water as the top city issue which should receive the greatest attention from city leaders, however when prompted, 67% place drinking water among the top three priorities that the city should address with residents.

A large majority of residents (76%) are aware that there has been some type of change to the disinfection process. The same proportion (77%) has noticed a change to their tap water, and of those, the majority (57%) feels the taste and odour of the water is worse. Compared to a year ago, just over one-third (35%) of residents say they are drinking less tap water, the most of whom dislike the taste and odour (82%).

Satisfaction with the quality of the current drinking water is fairly low (only 50% are satisfied with it). However, once residents are told of the reason for the change in the disinfection process, the majority (64%) say the water is acceptable as it is now. Further, once those who indicated the drinking water is unacceptable are told of the benefits of the new process, a majority indicate that the water is acceptable given these reasons. Overall, this brings the acceptability among residents up to as high as 84%.

In addition, when provided a series of potential remedies to improve the current taste and odour of the water, seven in ten residents (72%) are opposed to PUC adding chemicals to the water in an attempt to improve the taste and odour knowing there is no guarantee that doing so will make the water taste and smell exactly as it did before the change. Further, three quarters (75%) are opposed to PUC adding more water treatment chemicals to the drinking water knowing it would be more hazardous for PUC workers.

Residents are split however on whether they support PUC attempts to improve the taste and odour of the drinking water based on the cost trade-off - a cost of approximately \$5 million which would increase their water rates by one dollar per month (45% Oppose vs. 44% Support).

Recommendations:

The research suggests that at present there is insufficient public support to undertake any of the identified remedies in order to improve the taste and odour of the drinking water. The majority of the public is not favour of these remedies.

Clearly this is an important issue to residents of Sault Ste Marie and they want to hear from the City/ PUC on this issue. As such, we suggest the City/PUC develop a communications plan that identifies for residents the reasons for the change in disinfection process as well as the benefits of the change.

The research suggests that this information should satisfy at least half of the one-third of residents who find the quality of the water unacceptable.