

Baldwin Wallace University Community Research Institute

# Customer Service Satisfaction and Awareness Study

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

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## Executive Summary

### Project Overview

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (NEORSD) contracted with the Baldwin Wallace University Community Research Institute (CRI) to conduct a comprehensive study of customer perceptions of the NEORSD and develop recommendations for future development of public awareness and communications strategies for the District. The CRI proposed that a combination of several elements would be necessary to develop a comprehensive analysis of perceptions of the NEORSD, in part through study of customer perceptions, and also through collection and analysis of data from comparable sewer authorities across the U.S. This study significantly expands beyond the scope of prior surveys conducted by the CRI for the NEORSD in 2009, 2010, and 2011, in which phone surveys of homeowner customers of the NEORSD were conducted to gather and analyze data concerning priorities for the work of the NEORSD, perceptions of the agency, and awareness of NEORSD media campaigns.

The study involved the following components:

- \* a landline phone survey of NEORSD residential household customers, with completion of 800 survey responses;
- \* a landline phone survey of customers who called the NEORSD Customer Service Center during the period of March 1 – July 31, 2012, with completion of 300 survey responses;
- \* landline phone surveys of customers of sewer authorities serving Buffalo, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These authorities were chosen in part because each addresses combined sewer overflow issues (CSOs). In addition, Buffalo and Milwaukee were chosen because these authorities serve customers in the Great Lakes region; Philadelphia was chosen because of its reputation for proactive community relations. Each survey had 200 completed responses, providing data used in a comparative analysis of perceptions of NEORSD customers;
- \* Eight focus groups were conducted with household and business customers of the NEORSD. Two groups (one household, one business) of 5-15 participants for each of four regions of the NEORSD were formed (Cleveland, West, East, and South). Each session was conducted by Tom Sutton and audio recorded, from which verbatim transcripts were created and analyzed.
- \* Phone interviews were conducted with community relations, communications, and government affairs staff of sewer authorities that address CSO issues, and that provide an array of communications outreach services. The authorities interviewed were as follows: Buffalo, NY; Central Contra Costa, CA; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC; District of Columbia; Louisville, KY; Milwaukee, WI; Philadelphia, PA; Rochester, NY (in person interview).

\* Phone and in-person interviews were conducted with local elected officials to gauge their perceptions of the work and visibility of the NEORSD.

\* Total number of subjects for the project included 1,815 participants in the five phone surveys; 84 focus group participants; 20 interviews with sewer district staff and local elected officials.

The expanded scope of data gathering compared to prior NEORSD surveys added several benefits:

- Accuracy of NEORSD household customer phone survey data improved with increase in sample size from 500 to 800, reducing the sampling margin of error from 4.4% to 3.5%.
- Phone surveys of customers in three other sewer district regions allows for comparative analysis of customer perceptions of NEORSD with perceptions of customers of two sewer authorities serving customers in the Great Lakes region (Buffalo and Milwaukee) and a sewer district considered by sewer district peers to have a strong reputation for community relations (Philadelphia).
- Inclusion of survey of users of NEORSD Customer Service Center enabled analysis of perceptions of user experience and quality of call responses.
- Use of focus groups of business and residential NEORSD customers collected valuable qualitative data that included specific perceptions and suggestions from customers about NEORSD community awareness efforts, particularly in the context of raising fees for Project Clean Lake and stormwater management.
- Interviews with sewer district staff of eight sewer authorities addressing CSO issues and customer awareness collected valuable data concerning peer agency community awareness efforts, management of CSO issues, and management of fee increases.
- Interviews with local elected officials provided opportunity for constituent feedback about NEORSD community awareness of Project Clean Lake, stormwater management, and overall perceptions of the District's work and effectiveness.

The study began in early July, 2012 after approval of the study contract. CRI staff worked closely with NEORSD staff to design and implement phone surveys and interview questions for the focus groups and sewer authority and public official interviews. Weekly progress reports were provided by CRI to Kim Jones, NEORSD Manager of Communications and Community Relations. All phone surveys were conducted during the period of July 11<sup>th</sup> – August 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The focus groups were conducted during the evenings of August 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>. Interviews of sewer authority staff and public officials occurred during the period of August 20<sup>th</sup> – September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

The data gathered from all components of the study were analyzed by the CRI team and used to produce a set of recommendations for communications and public awareness efforts by the NEORSD. Details concerning the study research design follow in Project Study Methodology.

The study produced many important findings that will be useful to the NEORSD as it continues to develop its communications and public awareness strategies. Specific findings are reported under the headings of each component of the study. Highlights of the study's findings include:

#### 1. NEORSD customer priorities:

- Cleanliness of Lake Erie and area waterways ranked high as a priority by NEORSD customers. Respondents ranked as 'Very Important' or 'Important' - 95% keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water; 92% keeping Lake Erie clean for recreational use; 90% keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use; 66% ranked basement and sewer flooding as a 'very important' or 'important' concern.
- 94% of respondents rank keeping water bills affordable as 'very important' or 'important', while 91% give same ratings to affordability of sewer bills.
- There is a lack of understanding about stormwater treatment: 27% do not know about stormwater treatment, and 31% of respondents think stormwater is always or mostly treated. 42% think that stormwater is mostly or always untreated.
- 35% of respondents think it is always or mostly safe to swim in Lake Erie, while 54% think it is almost always or always unsafe to swim in the Lake. 74% think it is possible to get information about beach water quality; 32% get this information from the *Plain Dealer*; 14% from the EPA; 10% from NEORSD; and 9% from the Cleveland Metroparks and 9% from the Ohio State parks websites.

#### 2. Customer awareness of NEORSD and its work:

- NEORSD has good recognition by customers of its role in addressing customer priorities. NEORSD was identified from a list of agencies as the responsible entity by three-quarters of respondents for the following issues:
  - treatment of wastewater: 78%
  - cleanliness of Lake Erie: 73%
  - keeping drinking water clean: 70%
  - handling basement and street flooding: 75%
- NEORSD customers have low unaided recall of its role; understanding increases significantly when customers receive 'prompts', e.g., a list of agencies that might fulfill a particular function.
- The NEORSD 'Keeping Our Great Lakes Great' slogan was recognized by 46% of respondents, followed by 32% recognition of 'Pick Up Poop (PUP),' and 14% each for

‘Where Does It Go’ and the Business Opportunity Program. The only slogans with higher recognition were national and generic: ‘Recycle Today for a Better Tomorrow’ (used by the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste Management District) had 47% recognition, and ‘Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle’ had 70% recognition.

- Local elected officials have mixed perceptions of NEORS; all agree on the importance of its work. Some are very satisfied with communications efforts, while others think more can be done. All have varying levels of concern about rising fees and the effect on their constituents.

### 3. Customer perceptions of quality of NEORS work:

- Customer perceptions of value: NEORS had 53% ‘excellent/good’ rankings for treatment of wastewater, while the Water Department had 68% rankings for provision of drinking water. The Water Department had a slight edge in rankings of value of service, with 40% saying they provide good value, versus 38% saying the same about NEORS.
- 45% of respondents think that the NEORS is responsive to customer needs, compared to 49% who identified the Water Department as responsive, and 50% who identified their municipal government as responsive.
- The NEORS Customer Service Center was rated as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ by 61% of survey respondents (customers who had called the CSC between March 1<sup>st</sup> and July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012). Of public agencies, the CSC ranked first in responsiveness to customers, and received an ‘A’ or ‘B’ grade from 58% of respondents in comparison to other business customer service centers.
- Customer evaluation of sewer and water authorities: The NEORS had the highest percentage of ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ ratings at 49%. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer Authority came in next at 46%, followed by the Philadelphia Water and Sewer Department at 38% and the Buffalo Sewer Authority at 37%. For ratings of water authorities, an ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ rating was given by 65% of Cleveland, 64% of Milwaukee, 50% of Buffalo, and 45% of Philadelphia.
- Getting money’s worth in water and sewer bills: Cleveland area residents appear to think they are not getting as much value in comparison with residents of the other three regions. Cleveland area respondents came in last at 38% saying they mostly think they are getting their money’s worth in their water bill, compared with 40% for Philadelphia, 42% for Buffalo, and 49% for Milwaukee. Milwaukee respondents also had the highest satisfaction with sewer bills at 47%, followed by 39% of Buffalo, 36% of Cleveland, and 26% of Philadelphia. Quarterly billing and the practice of having different entities handle billing for sewer services may affect these perceptions, particularly in Cleveland, where the Cleveland Water Department and other municipal agencies conduct billing for the NEORS.

- Focus group participants generally understand which agency handles billing, and are concerned about rising rates. Participants think NEORSRSD does good work, but insist that greater transparency concerning costs, fee increases, and project progress is needed to raise public trust. There was also consensus that keeping Lake Erie clean is economically important to the region.

#### 4. Additional findings:

- News media sources for NEORSRSD customers: TV still dominates, with 82% of respondents getting news from TV weekly, followed by 69% from the daily paper, 65% from radio, and 47% from a local paper such as the Sun News. 41% of respondents get news from national or local websites while 29% get news from social websites.
- Comparative survey data for Cleveland, Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia shows very stable responses to questions across the four sewer authority service regions. There is small variability in perceptions by customers concerning priority issues, identification of responsible agencies, and perceptions of quality of service. NEORSRSD had the highest ratings for quality of service among the four sewer authorities, as well as the best recognition of public communication slogans ('Keeping Our Great Lakes Great' and 'Pick Up Poop – PUP').
- Communications efforts across the eight sewer authorities interviewed for the study varies widely, ranging from having no budget and relying on press releases and communications from the mayor's office (Buffalo and Philadelphia) to fully developed school-based activities, community events, and use of mailings and social media (Charlotte-Mecklenburg, Central Contra Costa, Milwaukee), which serve as good examples that affirm what NEORSRSD has done and can aspire to accomplish.
- Community awareness activity budget data for each district was requested, but in most cases not shared. Central Contra Costa Sewer Authority spends \$120,000 annually on communications; Charlotte-Mecklenburg spends \$108,000 annually on mailings, and said that 70% of their community relations budget is spent on stormwater education.

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- NEORSRSD is a provider of essential services that are not in public view, which contributes to its relative anonymity. There are a few government agencies with high name recognition and visibility (mostly federal): EPA, NASA, CIA. The vast majority of government agencies at all levels of government are unknown by the general public. Overcoming these challenges is a core mission of public communications.
- Continuous communication with the public is an important component of making the connection between the NEORSRSD and the identified public priority of keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean. Constant, continuous repetition of the link between

NEORSD's work and clean waterways is essential for getting the message to sink in with the public. Public awareness efforts require TIME as well as money. Public opinion changes slowly (e.g., 40+ years to shift public attitudes about the dangers of smoking and second-hand smoke.)

- Communications strategies require specific branding activities, as indicated by the high level of recognition of the NEORSD slogan, 'Keeping Our Great Lake Great.' Signature events, a public spokesperson, and direct tie-ins of NEORSD work with keeping Lake Erie clean are key elements to be emphasized in communications efforts.
- Key challenges facing the NEORSD are overall public distrust of government and the perception that the agency is a monopoly that is not accountable to the public. Public accountability for service quality and management of fiscal resources is critical to improving the public image of NEORSD. Rising fees for sewer services need to be accompanied by continuous provision and explanation of stewardship of resources and progress in accomplishing the objectives of Project Clean Lake and the Stormwater Management Program, as well as ongoing infrastructure maintenance and improvements. Easily accessible reports about fiscal management and project progress will improve public perceptions of the accountability of the NEORSD, which will also improve its overall image.
- The Customer Service Center should collect personal identification information about each caller, including a personal phone number and home, address. Using the phone number recorded during the call is difficult to track, as many respondents called the CSC from a work number, which was often a large business or organization with one central phone number. The Customer Service Center should also work to reduce the percentage of repeat calls, focusing on strategies to increase one call responses to customer concerns.
- The NEORSD will continue to be challenged in its community awareness efforts by the effects of combined billing with the Cleveland Water Department and other municipal billing entities. The lack of a separate bill, combined with the restrictions on what can be included as messaging in a combined bill creates significant blurring of the NEORSD identity with its customers. NEORSD needs to continue to develop strategies for distinctive identification of its work separate from the Water Department. Community awareness initiatives such as communication of branding slogans (in particular, 'Keeping Our Great Lake Great'); development of signature events that are identified with the NEORSD, and having a publicly known spokesperson for the NEORSD are key components of such a strategy.
- The NEORSD needs to adjust expectations concerning customer accuracy in recall about messaging, and about awareness of agencies responsible for public services such as waste treatment.
- Further analysis of budgets for communications work in other sewer districts is needed. How much is reasonable? Factor in size of districts and their priorities for communications.

- The need for a more comprehensive campaign approach for NEORSD; what are the central priorities, and how does each communications initiative advance the central priority?
- Messaging priorities:
  - \* How well is the NEORSD doing?
  - \* Do you (the customer) get your money's worth?
  - \* Are people aware of the issues related to NEORSD work?
  - \* Does NEORSD provide good customer service?
- NEORSD should focus part of its communications on the legacy of environmental cleanup – that the creation of the EPA was in part a response to the dramatic pictures of the burning Cuyahoga River. The changes to the condition of Lake Erie and area rivers since 1970 are a compelling testament to the importance of the work of agencies such as the NEORSD.
- Emphasize health benefits of having a clean lake and waterways.
- Increase local, targeted communications in neighborhoods affected by basement and street flooding. Develop communications plan to inform and update neighborhoods affected by NEORSD construction projects such as Project Clean Lake.

Complete details concerning recommendations for community awareness and communications strategies are available in Part III of the report.

## Project Study Methodology

The Baldwin Wallace University Community Research Institute (CRI) implemented a three-pronged approach to gather and analyze data concerning customer perceptions of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, to be used to develop recommendations for communications strategies for the District to use during the implementation of new fees related to the Stormwater Management Program and the ongoing implementation of Project Clean Lake.

1. Gather and analyze data on the perception of the NEORSD in the Cleveland community from household customers, users of the NEORSD Customer Service Center, business and nonprofit staff, and elected officials.
2. Provide comparative data from sewer districts faced with challenges similar to those faced by NEORSD.
3. Develop recommendations for communication strategies most appropriate for the NEORSD.

### **Cleveland area data collection methodology**

The CRI used several approaches to capture information from a wide spectrum of constituent groups to determine perceptions of the NEORSD and its role as well as to develop recommendations for future marketing efforts.

### **Phone survey of current NEORSD customers**

The CRI developed a comprehensive survey instrument used to conduct a landline phone survey of homeowners served by the NEORSD (see Appendix 1 for survey instrument). A landline phone survey was preferable, as it is more likely to reach homeowners, and is less expensive than a survey that includes cell phone numbers. A comprehensive customer address database provided by the NEORSD was used by GoLeads, Inc., a database contractor for the CRI, to derive landline numbers for a randomized sample of homeowners, stratified by location within the District service area so as to have a representative distribution of survey respondents. The survey was conducted during the period of July 11<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> on Monday – Friday evenings, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Calling was conducted in the CRI Survey Center by students of Baldwin Wallace University under the supervision of CRI Director Tom Sutton and project coordinator Lizabeth Disiena. The target of 800 completed surveys was exceeded, with 830 completed surveys collected. The survey had a sample margin of error of 3.5% with a 95% confidence level at 50% distribution (the most conservative measure).

The survey collected data concerning customer perceptions of the NEORSD, its function, and the degree to which it is identified as the agency responsible for the cleanliness of Lake Erie. Questions were also included regarding about the effectiveness of the NEORSD and the value of its services. Respondents were asked their priorities for each of the following issues, as well as their perception about the role of the NEORSD and other public agencies in addressing each issue:

- Keeping Lake Erie clean for recreational use
- Keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water
- Minimizing the chance of neighborhood street flooding
- Minimizing the chance of neighborhood basement flooding
- Keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use
- Maintaining the quality of our drinking water
- Keeping water rates/service affordable
- Keeping sewer rates/service affordable

Respondents were also asked questions to determine their awareness of what happens to sanitary wastewater and stormwater; what type of media they use on a regular basis; and which NEORSD public awareness campaigns they have heard, read, or seen. Comparative questions were then asked to determine the relative value given by respondents to the services of the NEORSD and the Cleveland Water Department. This was specifically because of the situation in which NEORSD services are billed by municipal water department, in particular the Cleveland Water Department, which is also the primary provider of drinking water for most NEORSD communities. The survey concluded with questions about respondent demographics, gathering data on gender, race/ethnicity, level of education attained, annual household income, homeowner status, number of adults and children in the household, and whether the respondent was registered to vote.

The results of the NEORSD household customer survey are reported in Part I, Section I of the study.

### **Phone survey of callers using the NEORSD Customer Service Center**

The CRI conducted a survey of individuals who used the NEORSD Customer Service Center to gauge their experience with the Center. The staff of the NEORSD Customer Service Center (CSC) worked with the CRI staff to assemble a database of customers who had called the CSC during the period of March 1<sup>st</sup> – July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012, yielding a population of 1,042 usable phone numbers. Many were not able to be used because they were business numbers that did not allow specific identification of the caller as the individual being the one who had called the CSC. The CSC staff also reviewed and approved a survey instrument designed by the CRI (the instrument was also reviewed by the NEORSD Communications Manager).

The survey began with questions about the type and frequency of caller contact with the CSC. This data was compared with the record of the CSC database to determine the accuracy of caller memory. Respondents were asked a series of questions about why they called, whether their problem was resolved, and if the hours of the CSC are convenient. It should be noted that the CSC gets many calls from customers who are actually seeking assistance from the Cleveland Water Department and are redirected to that number. Likewise, many callers are referred to the CSC after having first called the Cleveland Water Department seeking assistance with a sewer-related question.

The survey achieved the target of 300 completed responses. 316 individuals began the survey, and 302 completed all or most of the questions. This was not a sample, but rather a population survey in which all 1,042 individuals who were listed in the database provided by the NEORSD CSC were contacted to participate. The 30% survey participation rate is quite high compared to the typical 5% - 10% participation rate in randomized sample surveys. Of the population of 1,042 individuals, 671 had called the CSC once, and 371 had called more than once. The survey was conducted by Baldwin Wallace University students in the CRI Survey Center during daytime hours of 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm, and was completed during the period of August 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012. The survey findings are reported in Part I, Section 2.

### **Phone surveys of customers of three sewer authorities**

The CRI conducted landline phone surveys to collect comparative data from customers of sewer authorities in three other locations: Buffalo, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The three sewer authorities were selected because each addresses CSO issues. Buffalo and Milwaukee were selected as sewer authorities at different stages of development of responses to U.S. EPA CSO reduction mandates (Buffalo has a preliminary plan; Milwaukee implemented a plan in the 1990s). Survey instruments paralleling the design of the NEORSD household customer survey were created, accounting for variations in types of media and public awareness campaigns conducted in each region. Baldwin Wallace University students conducted calls of customers in each of the regions during the period of July 30<sup>th</sup> – August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. Calls were made on Mondays – Fridays, during the periods of 2:00 – 5:00 pm and 6:00 – 9:00 pm (calling was not conducted on Friday evenings). The Philadelphia survey took the longest to complete and had the lowest caller response rate. Calling began on July 30<sup>th</sup> and was completed on August 14<sup>th</sup> over ten days and evenings. The Buffalo survey started on August 8<sup>th</sup> and was completed on August 16<sup>th</sup> over a period of six days and evenings. The Milwaukee survey was completed during the period of August 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup>. The target of 200 completed surveys was achieved for each of the locations. The sample margin of error for each survey is 5.3% at 30% distribution and 90% confidence level. Comparative presentation and analysis of the survey data from the three regions and the Cleveland survey is found in Part I, Section 3.

### **Focus Groups**

The CRI developed and conducted focus groups of business owners and households in the East, West, South and Cleveland regions of the NEORSD to generate further insights about customer perceptions of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. Household customers were recruited by asking respondents to the phone survey if they were interested in participating in a follow up focus group. Respondent contact information was gathered and used to call and email respondents to arrange for their participation in focus groups set up for the period of August 13 – 16, 2012. 211 individuals agreed in the survey to follow up contact. Respondents from the West and South regions were under-represented in the survey responses. Additional recruitment of focus group participants for these regions was conducted to fulfill the requirements of the focus

group design. 84 individuals participated in the focus groups, which ranged in size from 5 members to 15 members (details of group numbers are reported in Table 4.1).

The focus groups were conducted during a four evening period. Groups were arranged to meet at the Center for Innovation and Growth at the main campus of Baldwin Wallace University in Berea Ohio on August 13, 14, and 15. The West household and business focus groups were conducted on August 13<sup>th</sup>; the Cleveland household and business focus groups were conducted on August 14<sup>th</sup>; the South region household and business focus groups were conducted on August 15<sup>th</sup>. The East region household and business focus groups were conducted at the Baldwin Wallace University branch campus in Beachwood, Ohio on August 16<sup>th</sup>. Each focus group lasted one hour (during the times of 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. and 8:00 – 9:00 p.m.) The focus groups were conducted by CRI Director Tom Sutton; logistical arrangements were coordinated by student assistant Kim Novak-Sczcepinski (focus group questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3).

The focus groups produced qualitative data from household and business NEORS D customers in order to develop an understanding of their perceptions about the quality and value of NEORS D services, as well as their awareness of and reaction to rate increases for Project Clean Lake and the Stormwater Management Program. Audio recordings were made of each session, from which verbatim written transcripts were developed and analyzed using the ATLAS hermeneutic qualitative data analytics content analysis program. Key themes and points made across the focus groups are summarized, along with the aggregate data in Part II, Section 4.

### **Sewer authority staff phone interviews**

The BW Community Research Institute conducted telephone interviews with marketing, communications, and government relations staff of sewer authorities across the U.S. that were addressing combined sewer overflow (CSO) issues, to determine how these authorities were handling public awareness and civic education about their work. The authorities were jointly selected by CRI and NEORS D staff, based on the authority addressing CSO issues in the Great Lakes region, or being an authority with a positive reputation in the sewer authority field for community outreach and/or handling CSO issues.

Interviews were conducted with the staff of eight sewer authorities, including the three that were also targeted for household customer phone surveys (Buffalo, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). The other sewer authorities chosen were Central Contra Costa, California; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; District of Columbia; Louisville, Kentucky, and Rochester, New York. Staff identified for the interviews were those who addressed community relations, communications, and government relations. CRI coordinator Kim Novak-Sczcepinski researched each authority to identify and contact staff and conducted each of the phone interviews during the period of September 17<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (the Rochester, NY interview was conducted in person by BW student Harriet Petti on August 22, 2012).

Each staff person reached was asked a set of questions concerning the type of community outreach and education conducted by the authority; how rate increases are handled; perceptions of how the public understands the authority and its work; relations with other governmental bodies; and the communications budget for the authority (the interview questionnaire can be found in Appendix 5). Results of the sewer authority staff interviews are found in Part II, Section 6.

### **Elected Official interviews**

The BW Community Research Institute conducted interviews with four elected officials representing municipal governments in Cuyahoga County. An additional twelve interviews are in process, and will be included in an addendum to the report in December (the interviews were delayed due to addition of a third phone survey and three additional sets of sewer district staff interviews, as well as uncertainties resulting from communities involved in litigation with NEORSD). Interview subjects were selected in coordination with NEORSD staff, seeking to get perceptions about NEORSD from a group of elected officials representing NEORSD service communities in each region of the District, as well as a mix of party affiliations and positions (city council members, mayors, state representatives and state senators, and Congresswoman Marcia Fudge). Kim Novak-Sczcepinski and Tom Sutton conducted interviews with two mayors and two city council presidents. The results of the interviews are found in Part II, Section 5 (questionnaire can be found in Appendix 4). The interviews gathered data about the perspective of local officials and their perceptions of the NEORSD, in particular concerning the new Stormwater Management Program.

### **Development of Communication Strategies for the NEORSD**

The data gathered by the CRI from the phone surveys, focus groups, sewer district staff interviews, and elected official interviews was used to develop a set of recommendations for communication strategies for use by the NEORSD. The CRI retained the expertise of advertising and marketing specialist Phil Brindley, who used the data gathered in the study to create a set of recommendations for messages, use of media, events, and other strategies to raise public awareness of the work of the NEORSD. In particular, the strategies are focused on educating the public about reasons for fee increases and the benefits of Project Clean Lake and the Stormwater Management Program. The strategies include specific ideas for messages, educational outreach, programs and events, as well as recommendations for types of media usage. The communication strategies are detailed in Part III of the study.

## Part I: Phone Survey Data and Findings

### Section 1: Survey of NEORSD Household Customers

#### 1.A: NEORSD Customer Priorities

The phone survey of NEORSD customers asked about priority issues that have been identified as important concerns in prior surveys conducted in 2009, 2010, and 2011, as well as more recent issues related to increasing water and sewer rates and fees. The issues are as follows:

- Keeping Lake Erie clean for recreational use
- Keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water
- Minimizing the chance of neighborhood street flooding
- Minimizing the chance of neighborhood basement flooding
- Keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use
- Maintaining the quality of our drinking water
- Keeping water rates/service affordable
- Keeping sewer service affordable

It is clear that NEORSD customers place the highest priority on keeping Lake Erie clean and maintaining the quality of their drinking water. Figure 1.1 shows that 92% of respondents believe it is ‘very important/important’ to keep Lake Erie clean for recreational use. Similarly, 90% of respondents believe it is ‘very important/important’ to keep area rivers and streams clean for recreational use (Figure 1.5).

Clean drinking water is a nearly unanimous high priority. Figure 1.2 shows 95% of respondents listing keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water as ‘very important/important.’ This was also true of respondents listing ‘maintaining the quality of our drinking water,’ with 95% listing this as ‘very important/important’ (Figure 1.6).

Maintaining affordable water and sewer rates was also a high priority for customers. Figure 1.7 shows that 94% of respondents consider affordable water rates to be a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ concern, while 91% of respondents said the same about keeping sewer rates affordable.

Street and basement flooding was not as high a priority for customers. In Figures 1.3 and 1.4, 66% of respondents listed neighborhood, street and basement flooding as a ‘very important/important’ concern. It is interesting to note that 16% of respondents did not consider street flooding to be a concern at all, while 19% of respondents were not concerned about basement flooding. This may be due to the particularity of this issue, indicating that the majority of respondents have not experienced street or basement flooding and therefore do not consider this to be a concern (note: the raw data gathered from the surveys includes respondent communities, if needed for further analysis).

Figure 1.1: Keeping Lake Erie clean for recreational use

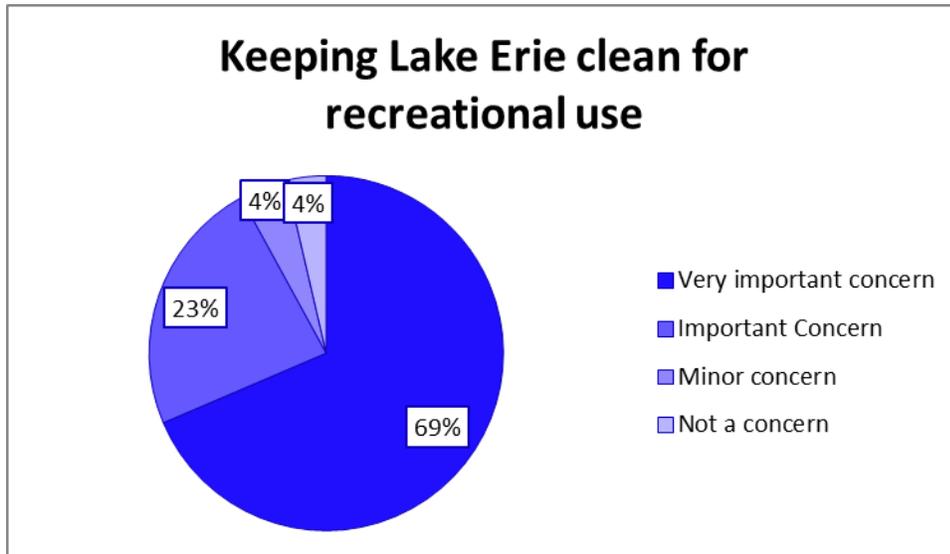


Figure 1.2: Keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water

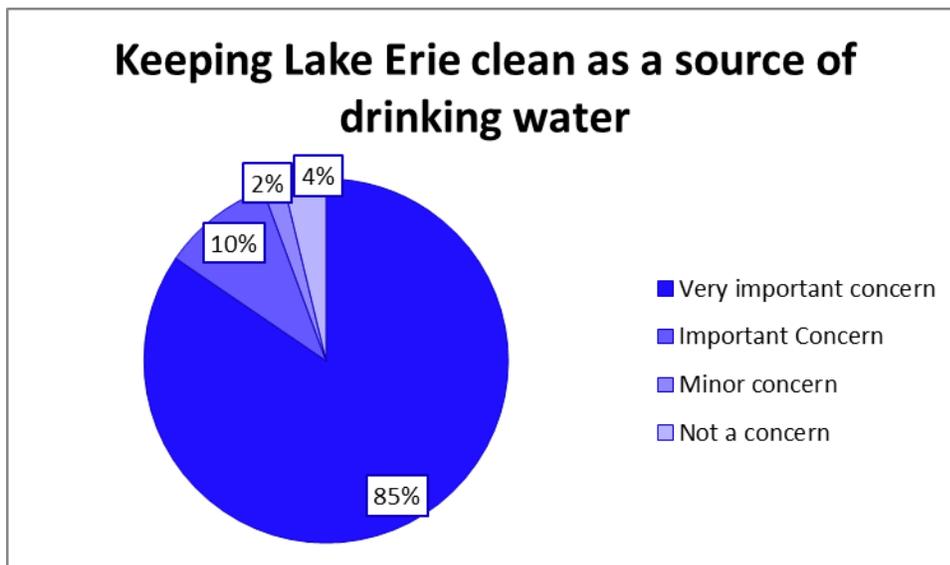


Figure 1.3: Minimizing the chance of street flooding in my neighborhood

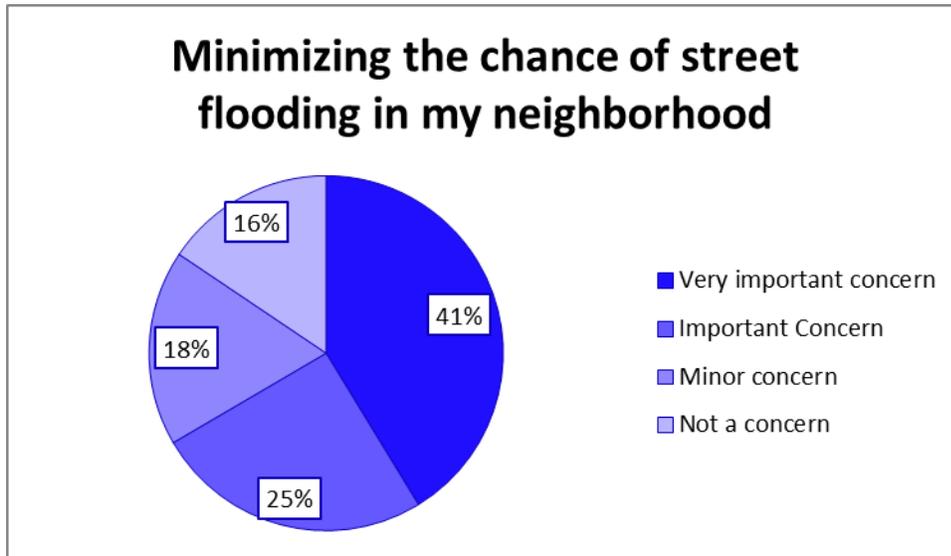


Figure 1.4: Minimizing the chance of basement flooding in my neighborhood

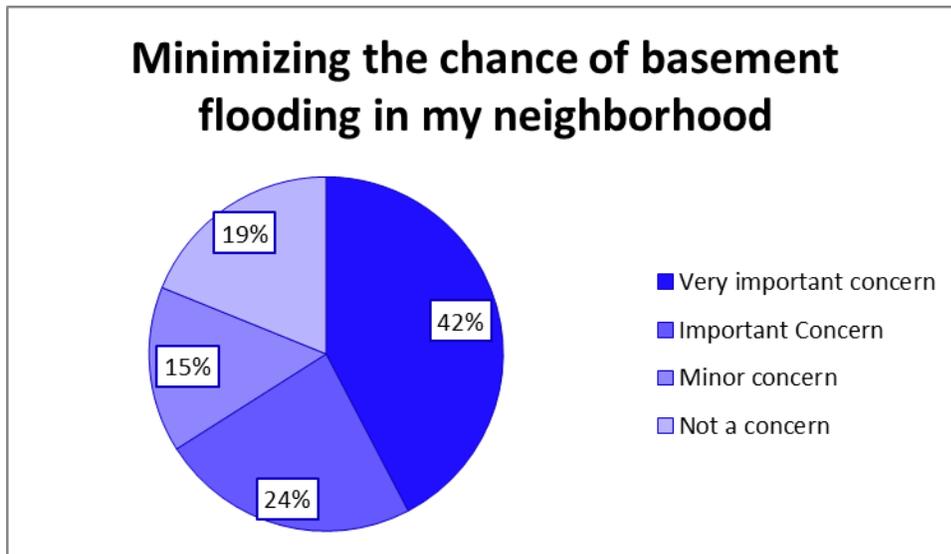


Figure 1.5: Keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use (e.g., Cuyahoga River, Rocky River, Mill Creek)

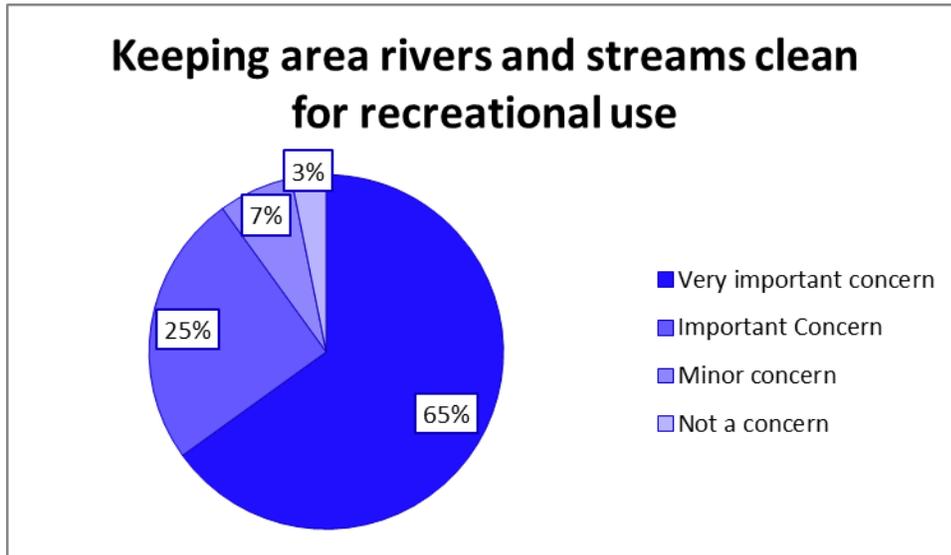


Figure 1.6: Maintaining the quality of our drinking water

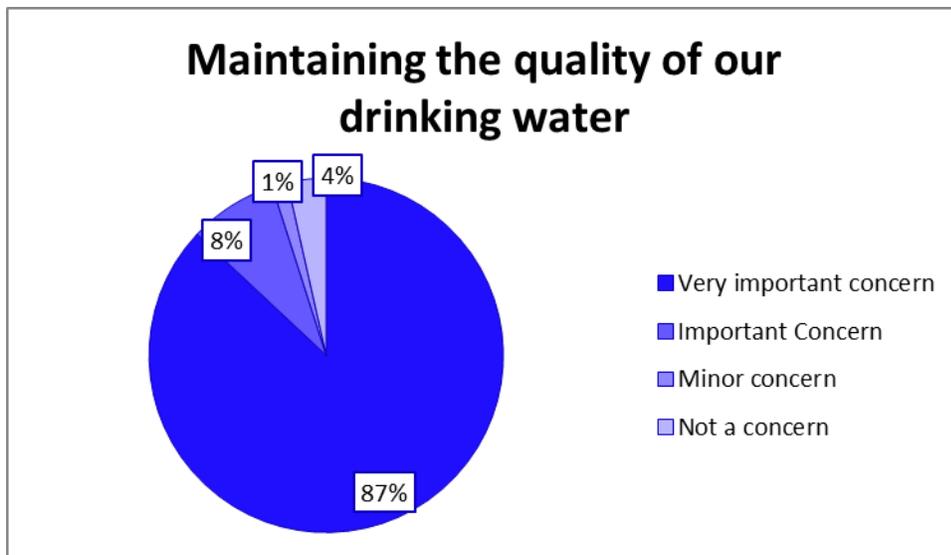


Figure 1.7: Keeping water rates/service affordable

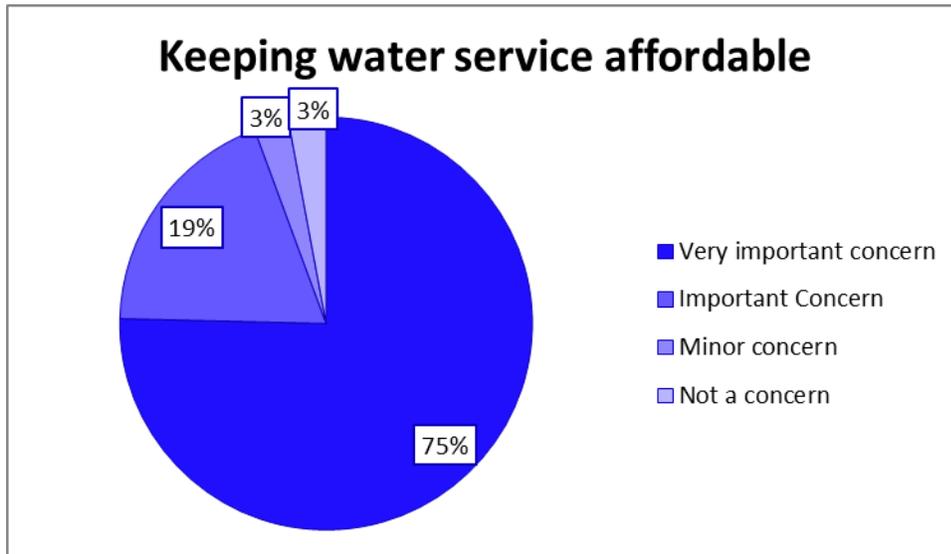
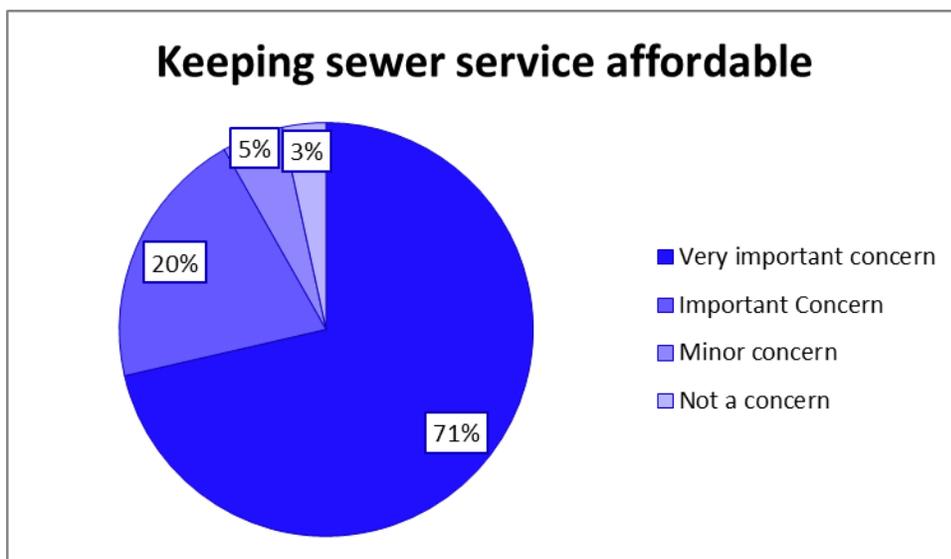


Figure 1.8: Keeping sewer service affordable



### 1.B: Agencies responsible for handling customer priorities

Respondents were then asked a series of questions about which public agencies were responsible for handling the issues asked about in the prior survey questions. A list of eight entities was provided to respondents, who were asked to answer 'yes' or 'no' for each agency concerning whether it was responsible for each of the issues being addressed (multiple agency choices were allowed.) Figures 1.9 – 1.13 present the comparative findings for respondent awareness of agency responsibility for keeping Lake Erie and area rivers and streams clean, maintaining the quality of drinking water, and perceptions of agency efficiency.

Figure 1.9 shows that the NEORSD ranked second at 73% in awareness of respondents for being responsible for helping to keep Lake Erie and area rivers and streams clean. Only the state Environmental Protection Agency is perceived to have a greater responsibility at 78%. The NEORSD was followed closely by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, chosen by 72% of respondents, and the federal Environmental Protection Agency, chosen by 71% of respondents. These findings suggest that respondents have a high and largely accurate awareness of which agencies have responsibility for keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean. The federal and state EPAs work with the NEORSD in regulation enforcement. Respondents may be linking ODNR with public beaches and parks and therefore perceiving them as being involved in lake and river cleanliness.

Figure 1.9: Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to keep Lake Erie and area rivers and streams clean? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

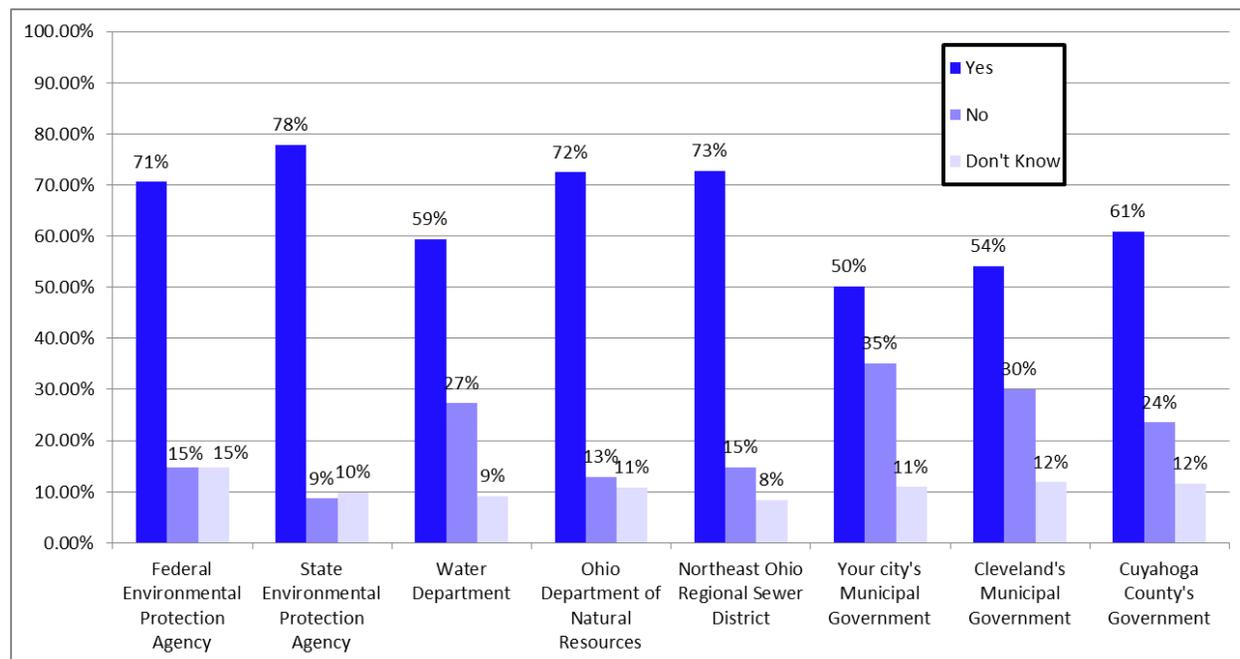


Figure 1.10 shows high levels of accurate customer awareness of agencies responsible for maintaining the quality of area drinking water. The highest response was 83% for the Water Department and 70% for the NEORSD. It is interesting to note that unlike the previous question, in which respondents closely tied the federal and state EPAs and NEORSD in being responsible for keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean, there is more separation concerning responsibility for clean water. 71% chose the state EPA and 61% chose the federal EPA as being responsible for drinking water quality.

Figure 1.10: Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to maintain the quality of our drinking water? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

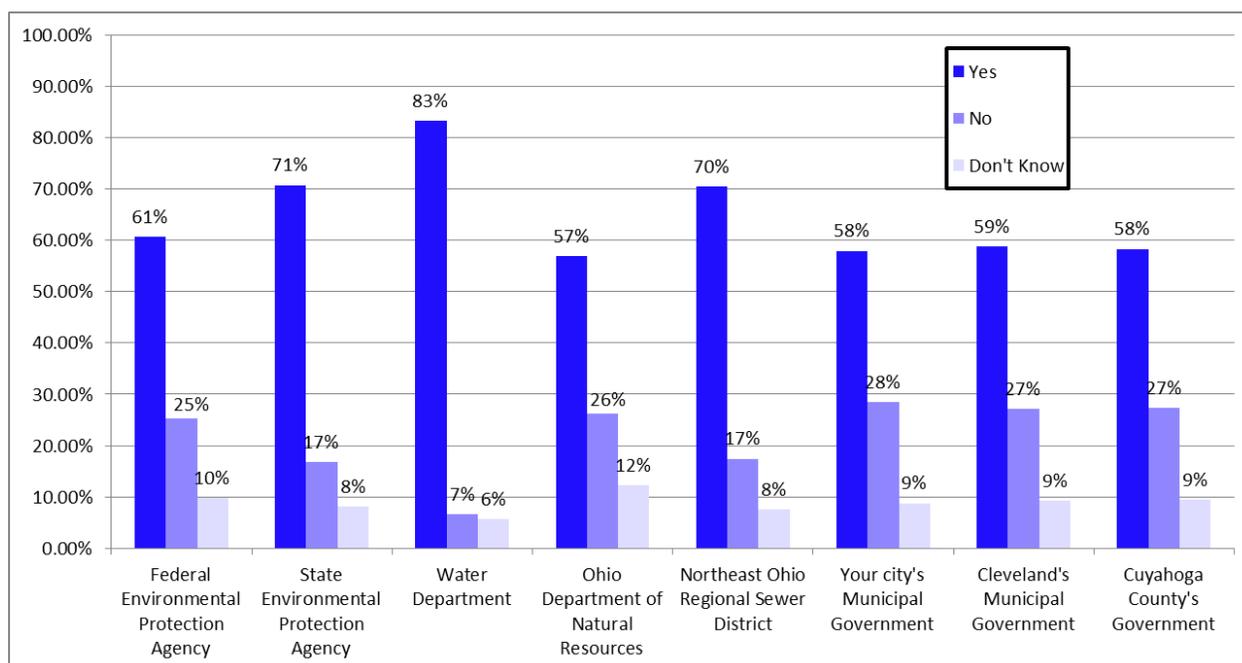


Figure 1.11 shows respondent perceptions about which agencies are responsible for preventing flooding of basements and streets. Respondent awareness was largely accurate, with 75% identifying the NEORSD and 72% identifying their municipal government as being primarily responsible. The accuracy of respondent perceptions becomes diffused with subsequent lower levels of identification. 56% identified Cuyahoga County government, followed by 54% identifying the Water Department and Cleveland City government as responsible. Federal and state environmental agencies had the lowest levels of identification, with 29% choosing the ODNR, 27% identifying the Ohio EPA, and 19% identifying the federal EPA.

Figure 1.11: Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to prevent flooding of basements and streets? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

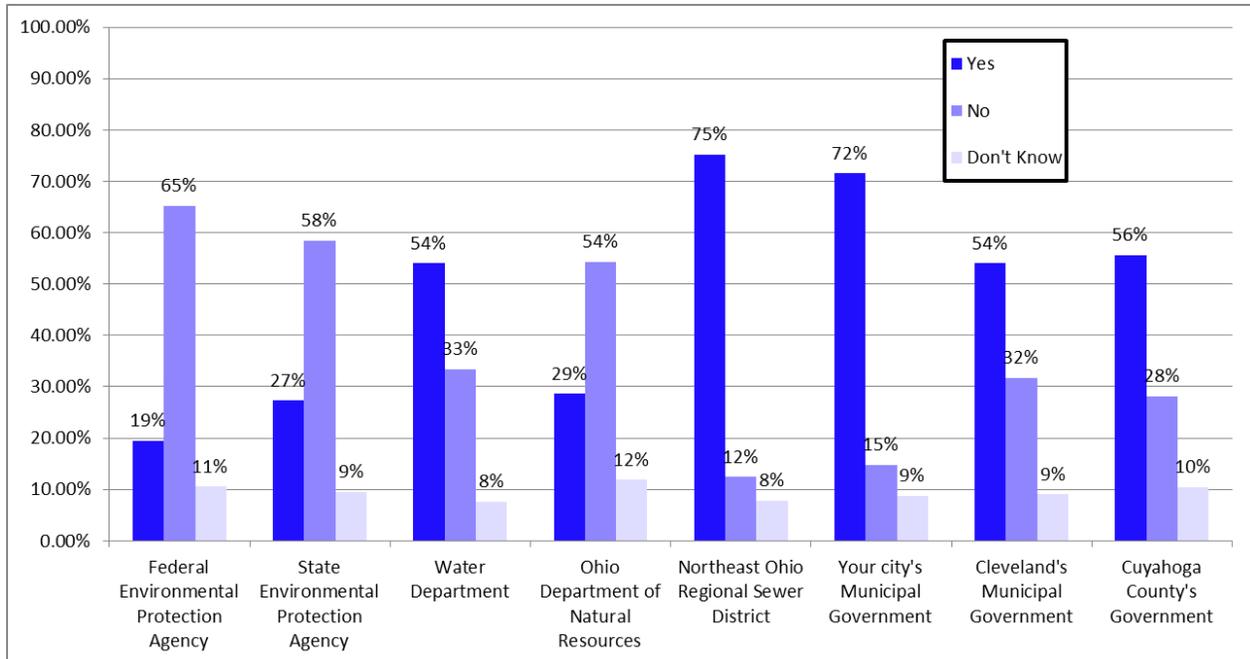


Figure 1.12 shows that respondents also had high accurate recognition of which agency is responsible for treating water after it is used, with 78% identifying the NEORSD. 70% identified the Water Department as being responsible, followed by 51% identifying their own municipal government or Cleveland city government as responsible. Cuyahoga County government was close behind with 50% perceiving that it is responsible for water treatment, followed by 47% identifying the Ohio EPA, 40% identifying the ODNR, and 37% identifying the federal EPA. Those who said they did not know if a particular agency was responsible for cleaning water after usage ranged from 6% for the Water Department to 11% for the ODNR.

Figure 1.12: Which of the following agencies are responsible for cleaning water AFTER we use it (wastewater)?

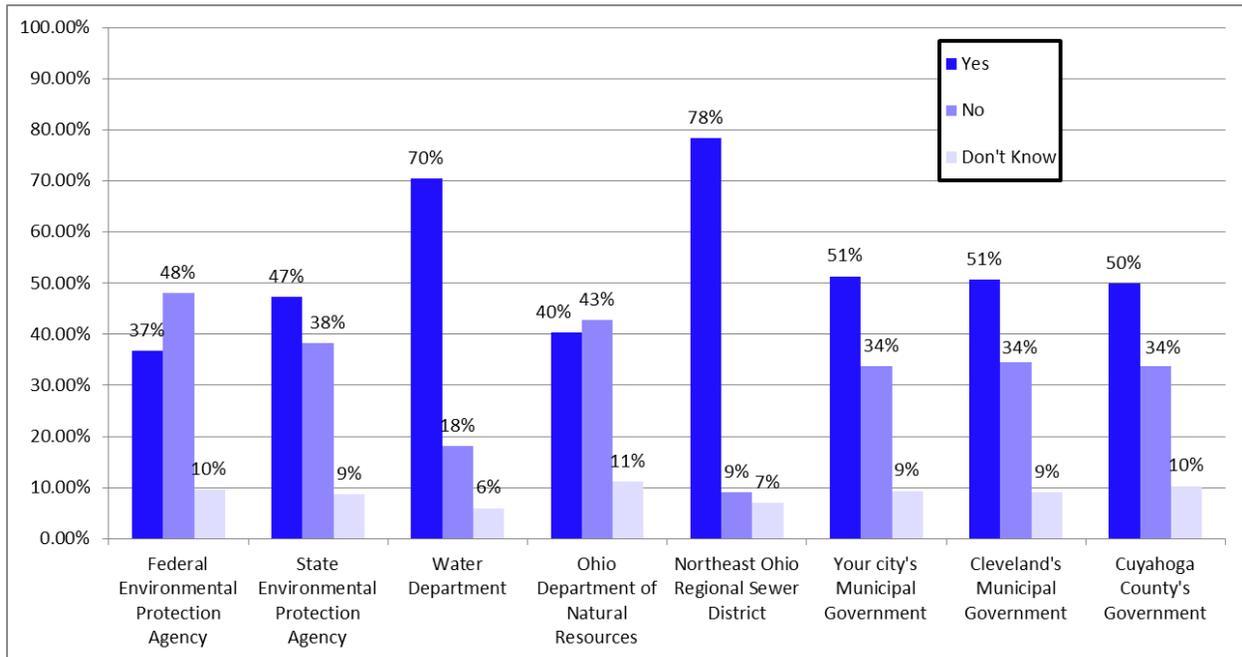
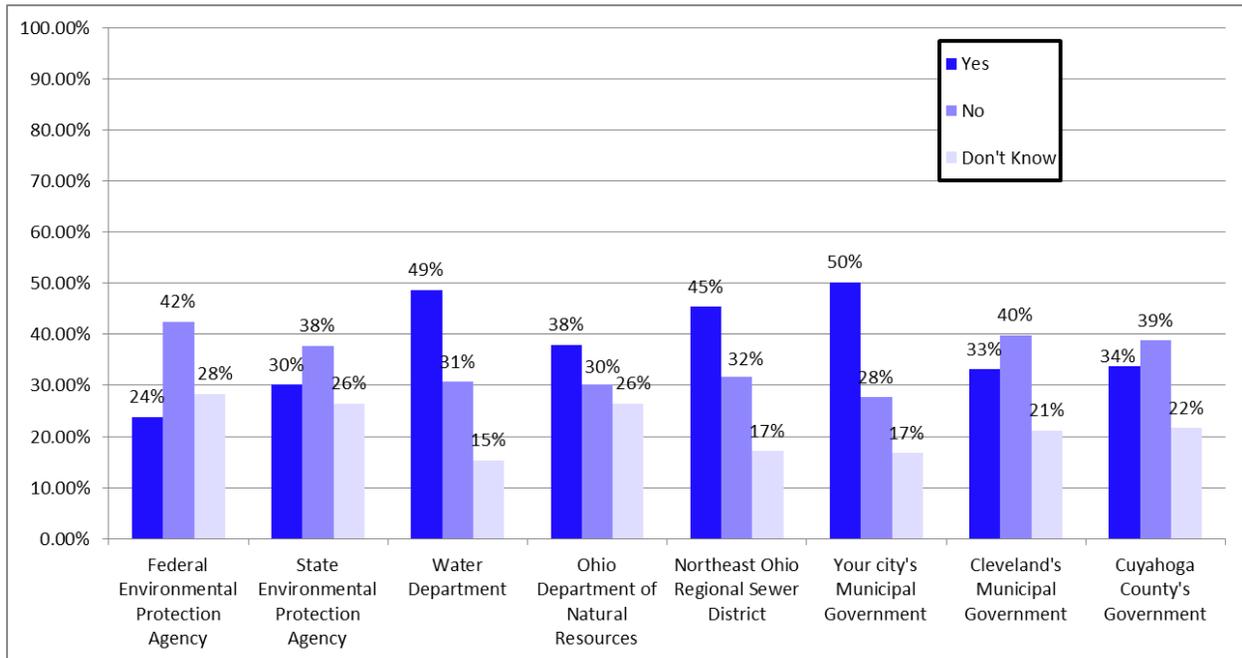


Figure 1.13 shows respondent perceptions about agency responsiveness to customer needs. The NEORSRD ranked a close third at 45%, with local municipal government chosen by 50% of the respondents and the Water Department chosen by 49% of respondents. Respondents chose these agencies most frequently as being responsible for handling each of their priority issues, and also chose these most frequently as being responsive to customer needs. It is interesting to note that this question also generated the highest percentage of respondents choosing 'don't know,' ranging from 15% for the Water Department to 28% for the federal EPA (17% used this response for the NEORSRD.)

Figure 1.13: Which agency impresses you as being most responsive to customers' needs?



Overall, NEORS household customer respondents perceive the responsibilities of the various public agencies relatively accurately regarding their roles in keeping Lake Erie clean.

### 1.C: Customer Awareness of Wastewater Treatment

Respondents do not have accurate awareness of the treatment process for storm and waste water treatment. Figure 1.14 shows that 42% of respondents accurately chose the responses 'mostly untreated' or 'always untreated' concerning whether stormwater goes into Lake Erie with or without treatment. More than a quarter of respondents (27%) do not know, while 31% believe erroneously that stormwater is either always or mostly treated.

When asked whether sanitary sewer water is treated before going into Lake Erie, 39% indicated accurately that it is mostly treated (accounting for excess wastewater that is sometimes untreated due to combined sewer overflow (CSO).) 19% of respondents thought wastewater was always treated, and 19% thought it was mostly or always untreated. 26% said they did not know.

Figure 1.14: Do you know whether stormwater (rain water that runs off roofs and streets) goes into Lake Erie with or without treatment?

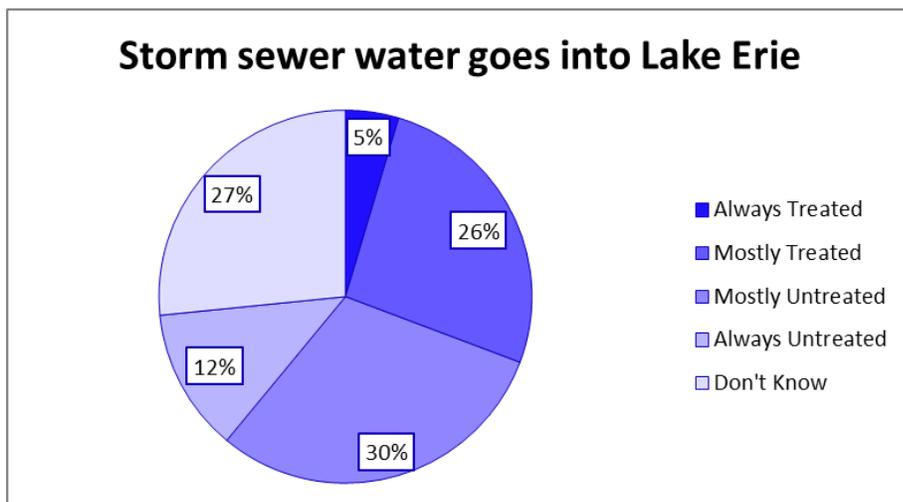
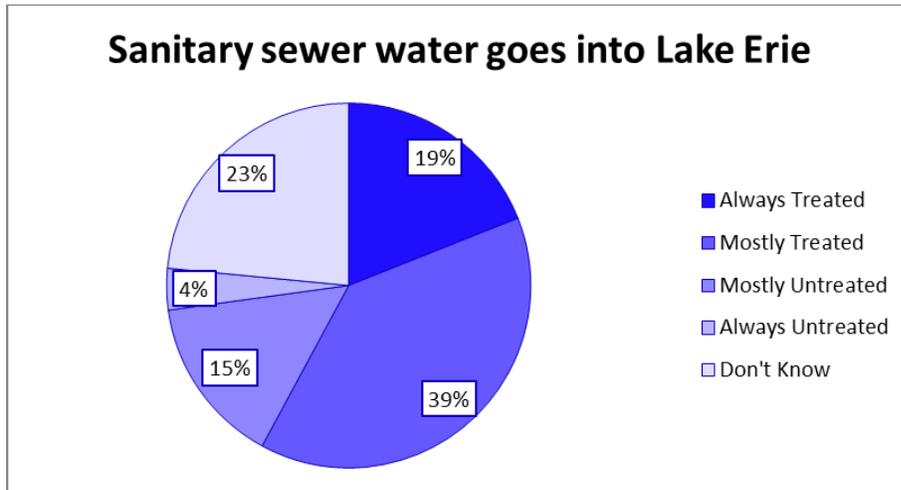


Figure 1.15: Do you know whether dirty water from household uses goes into Lake Erie with or without treatment?



### Section 1. D: Beach Quality Awareness and Media Usage

Figures 1.16 – 1.18 show results of respondent awareness of beach quality issues. In Figure 1.16, 35% of respondents perceive that bacteria levels at Lake Erie beaches are such that it is always or mostly safe for swimming. 54% believe it is mostly or always unsafe to swim due to bacteria levels, while 11% said they did not know.

According to Figure 1.17, 74% of respondents think it is ‘always or mostly’ possible to get information about beach quality, while 11% believe it is mostly or never possible, and 15% did not know. Figure 1.18 shows that 32% get information about beach quality from the Plain Dealer, while 14% get this information from the EPA website. Only 10% go to the NEORS D website for beach quality information, close to the 9% who go to the Metroparks website and the 9% who go to the Ohio state parks website.

Figure 1.16: Do you know whether bacteria levels at Lake Erie beaches make it safe or unsafe to swim in the Lake?

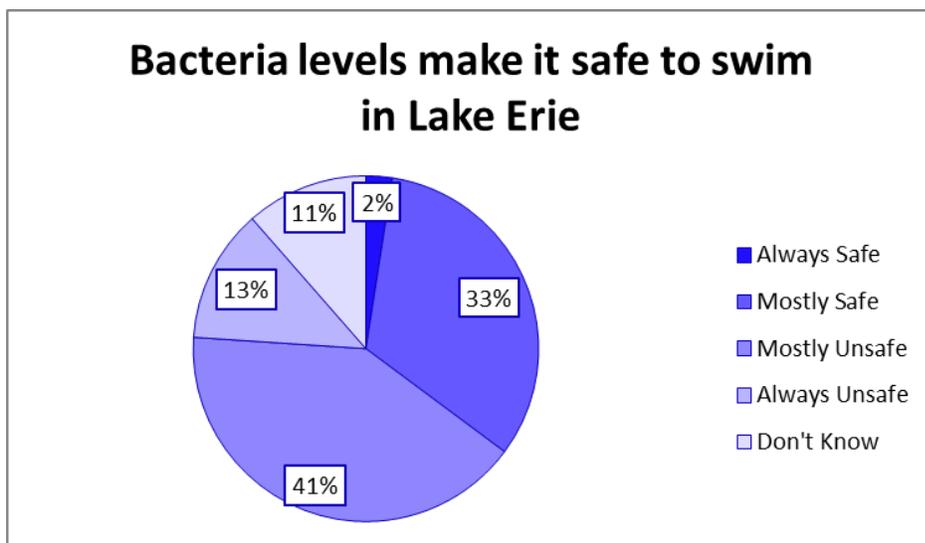


Figure 1.17: Do you know whether it is possible to find information about Lake Erie water quality?

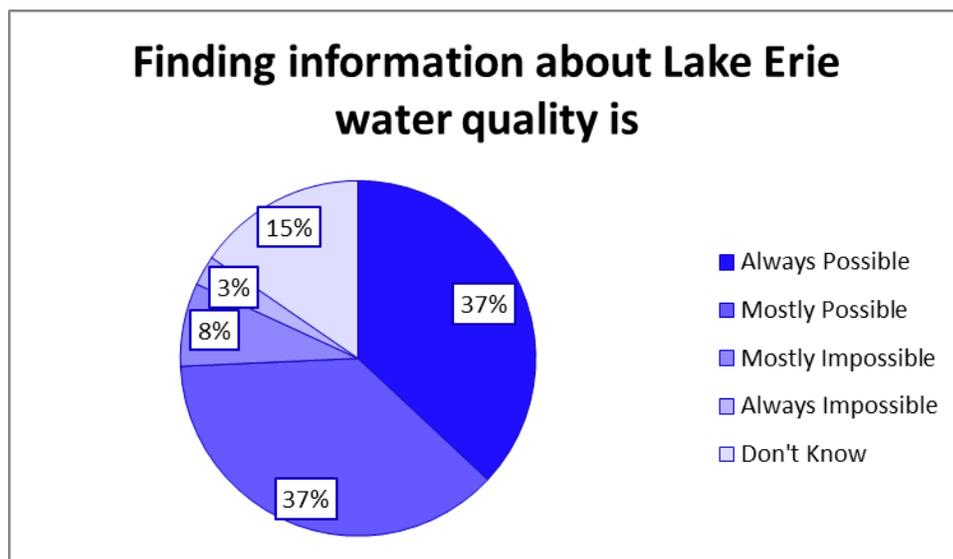


Figure 1.18: Which media do you use to get information about Lake Erie water quality?

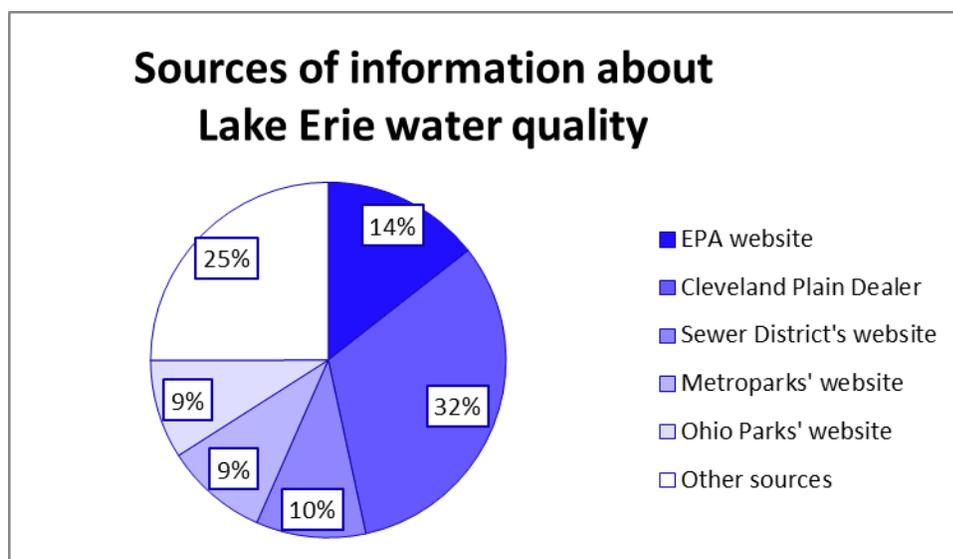
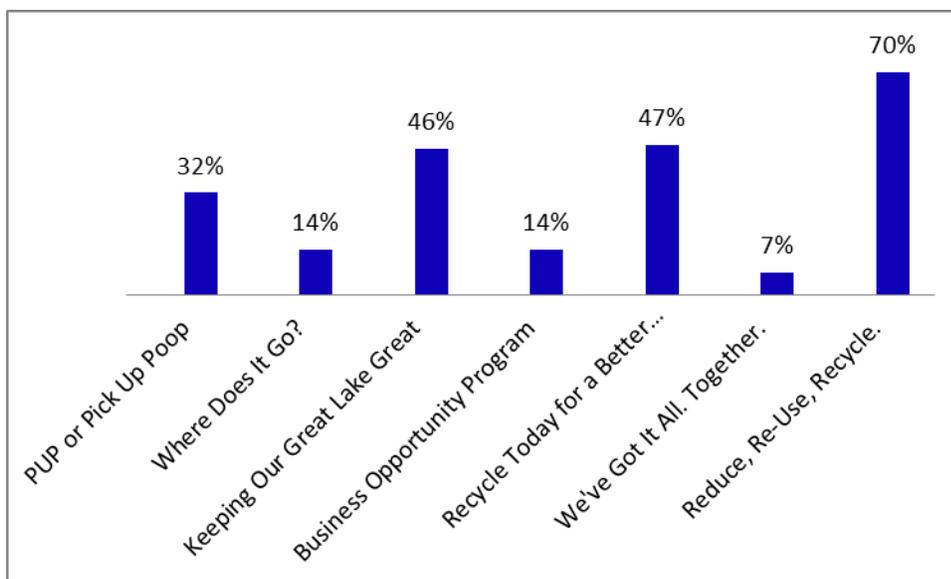


Figure 1.19 summarizes information from a series of questions asked of respondents concerning familiarity with a variety of media campaigns conducted by the NEORSD and other government and nonprofit agencies. Respondents were given the ‘signature phrase’ for each campaign and asked if they had ever heard the phrase.

The first four campaigns found in Figure 1.19 are from the NEORSD. 46% had heard the most recent campaign, ‘Keeping our Great Lake great.’ 32% had heard the ‘PUP, Pick Up Poop’ campaign. The older ‘Where Does it Go?’ NEORSD campaign was recognized by 14% of respondents, the same percentage as had heard of the NEORSD Business Opportunity Program. Of the three other campaigns asked of respondents, the highest recognition was 70% who had heard the phrase, ‘Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle’ (the phrase does not have an author or agency, but is believed to have emerged from the first Earth Day held in 1970). The phrase ‘Recycle Today for a Better Tomorrow’ was heard by 47% of respondents, while only 7% had heard of the Cleveland+ marketing campaign phrase, ‘We’ve Got It All. Together.’

Figure 1.19: Customer awareness of NEORSD and other media campaigns



The 46% recognition rate for the newest of the NEORSD’s public awareness campaign slogans, ‘Keeping Our Great Lake Great’ is a remarkable success. The only other slogans exceeding this in recognition are national in scope. ‘Recycle Today for a Better Tomorrow’ (47% recognition) is used by a wide variety of public and private entities (locally it is used by the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste Management District.) ‘Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle’ (70% recognition) made its first appearance over forty years ago at the first celebration of Earth Day. ‘Keeping Our Great Lake Great’ needs to continue as a campaign slogan, and be strongly tied to the work of the NEORSD.

Figures 1.20 and 1.21 show the unaided responses of customers when asked which public agency they think is responsible for each of the campaign slogans. The data in figure 1.20 demonstrates

that customers do not accurately connect slogans correctly with agencies. The NEORSD had low recognition as the origin of each of the slogans it sponsors, ranging from 12% for ‘Where Does It Go?’ to 0% for the Business Opportunity Program (which, in fairness, is not a public slogan, but rather a program for businesses). ‘Keeping Our Great Lake Great’ had very high overall recognition (46%, Figure 1.19), but was attributed to NEORSD by only 2% of respondents. Even more surprising was the 61% attribution of ‘Where Does It Go?’ and 25% of ‘Pick Up Poop’ to the Water Department. With the exception of ‘Where Does It Go?’, over half of respondents did not attribute other slogans to a specific agency.

Figure 1.21 shows very low attribution rates for non-NEORSD slogans. The most highly recognized slogan, ‘Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle,’ was attributed by 17% of respondents to the EPA, and 18% of respondents to municipal government. ‘Recycle Today for a Better Tomorrow’ was attributed by 22% of respondents to municipal government, and 9% of respondents to the EPA (it is actually used by the Cuyahoga County Solid Waste Management District, which could be considered ‘County’ as a response choice). This demonstrates that even for well-known slogans, accurate agency attribution is very low. NEORSD faces a categorical challenge trying to raise public awareness of its work. The public may recognize its slogans and campaigns, but tying these specifically to the name of the agency is a major challenge, not just for the NEORSD, but for most public agencies.

Figure 1.20: Customer attribution of NEORSD campaigns to public agencies

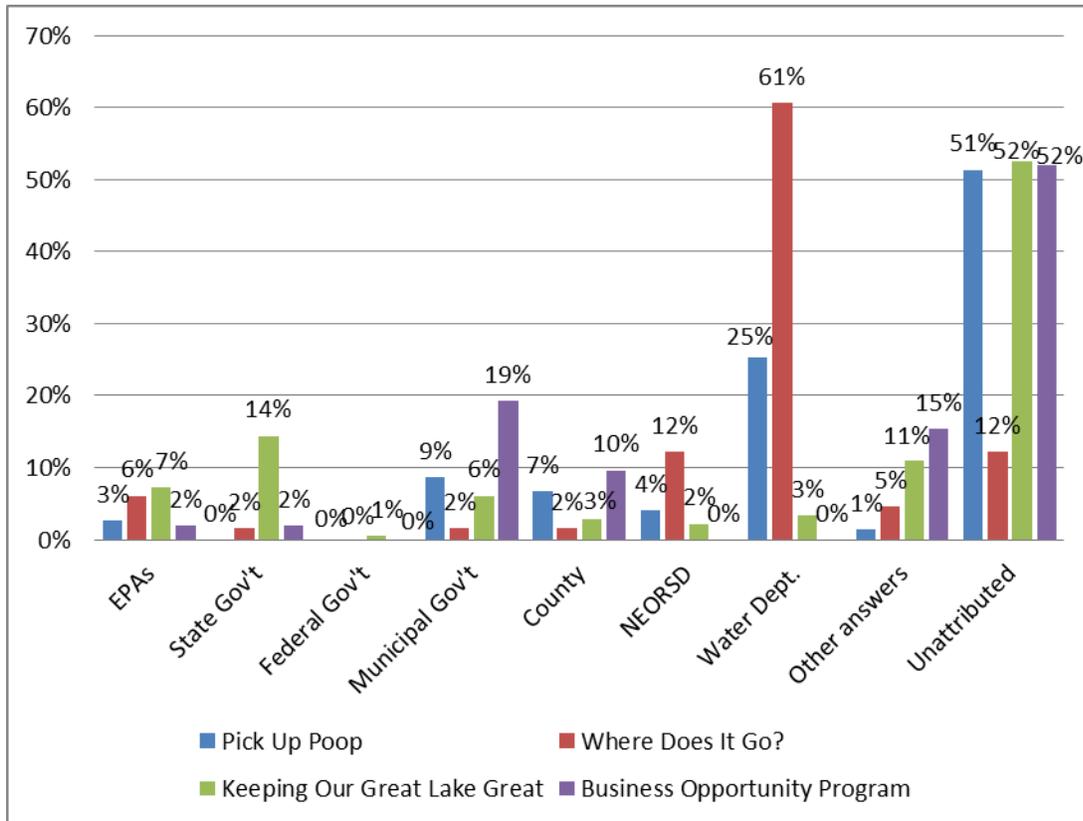
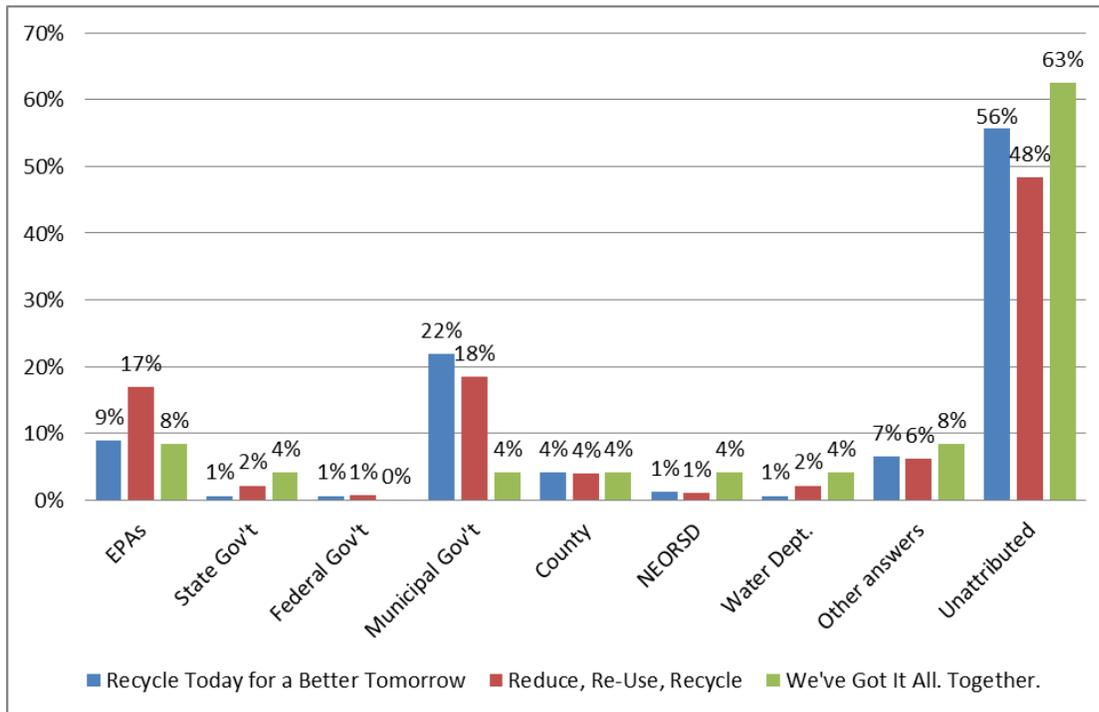


Figure 1.21: Customer attribution of non-NEORSRD campaigns to public agencies



### Section 1.E: Customer Perceptions of Value of NEORSD Services

NEORSD customer respondents gave the water department higher ratings than the NEORSD for delivery of service, quality of service, and value. Figure 1.22 shows that 68% of respondents rated the water department's job in providing drinking water as 'excellent' or 'good,' while 53% of respondents gave these ratings to the NEORSD for treatment of wastewater. This may be due to respondents having easier recognition of water service and consumption than of treatment of wastewater. People see water service every time they turn on a faucet. Wastewater treatment is not 'seen' per se; it is a hidden service that therefore is likely to get less recognition and possibly lower recognition for quality.

Figure 1.22: Comparative ratings of NEORSD and Cleveland Water Department on Quality of Service

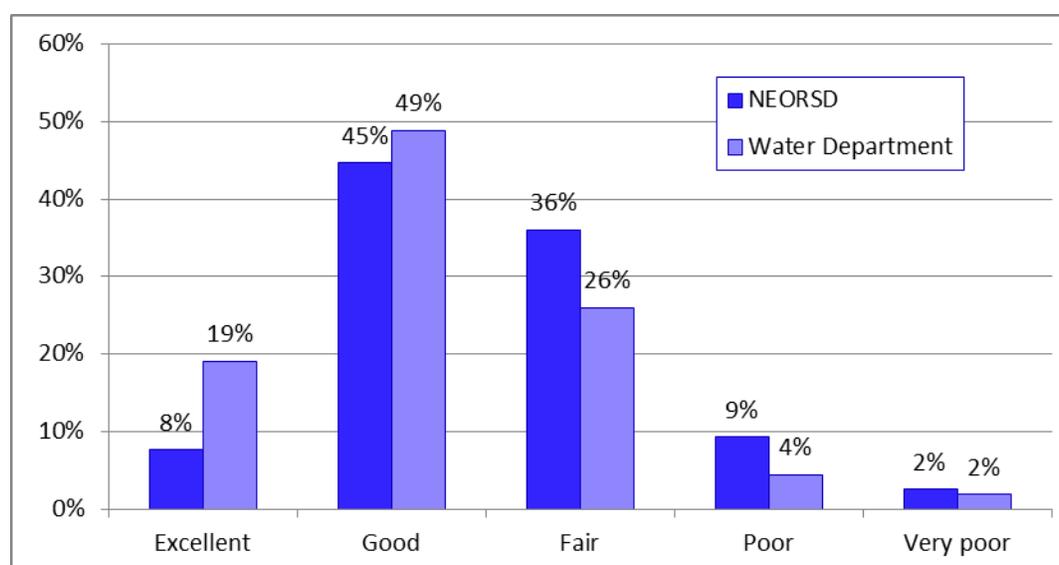
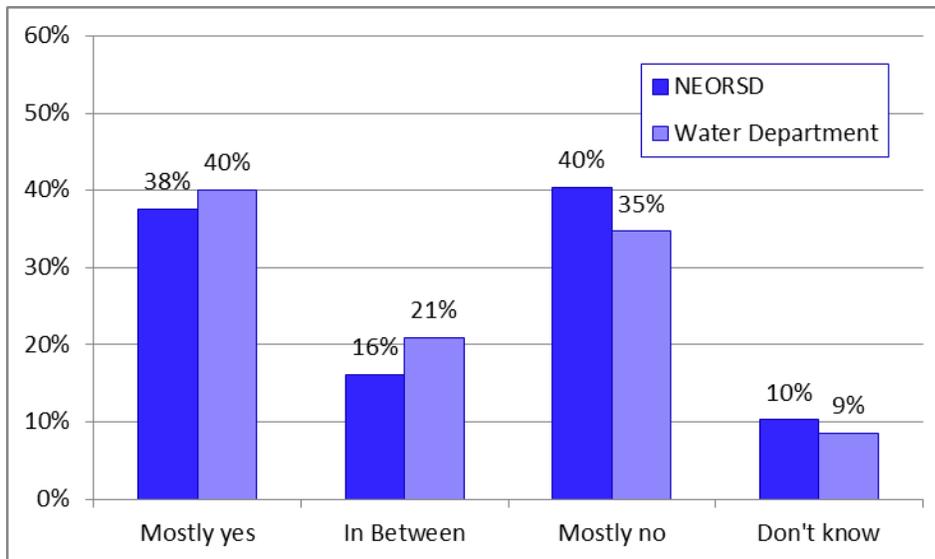


Figure 1.23 shows the comparative rankings of the NEORSD and the Cleveland Water Department for value of service. The Water Department ranked slightly higher, with 40% of respondents mostly agreeing that they were getting their money's worth, compared to 38% for the NEORSD. As with the data from Figure 1.22, this may be due in part to the challenge of placing a value on sewer service versus water service. Water is readily recognized and valued as something used and consumed. Sewer service is an infrastructure service that is necessary but not as easily recognized as a user service. An added challenge for the NEORSD is that customers are billed by the Water Department for sewer service, making this service less recognized as separate. As will be discussed later in the report, the billing process is one area where NEORSD recognition could be raised through strategies to provide customers with a clearer distinction between the Water Department and the NEORSD.

Figure 1.23: Comparative ratings of NEORS and Cleveland Water Department on value of service (“Are you getting your money’s worth?”)



## Section 1.F: NEORSD Customer Media Usage

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions about regular media usage. Respondents were asked the following: “I am going to ask you a few questions about the type of media you use each week. Could you tell me whether you use or read”

A daily regional newspaper, such as the Plain Dealer or the Akron Beacon Journal?

A local newspaper, such as the Sun Newspaper or Westlife?

A regional publication such as Cleveland Magazine, Crain's, or Lake Erie Living?

A national website, such as the New York Times or CNN?

A national or local radio?

A local website, such as Cleveland.com or Ohio.com?

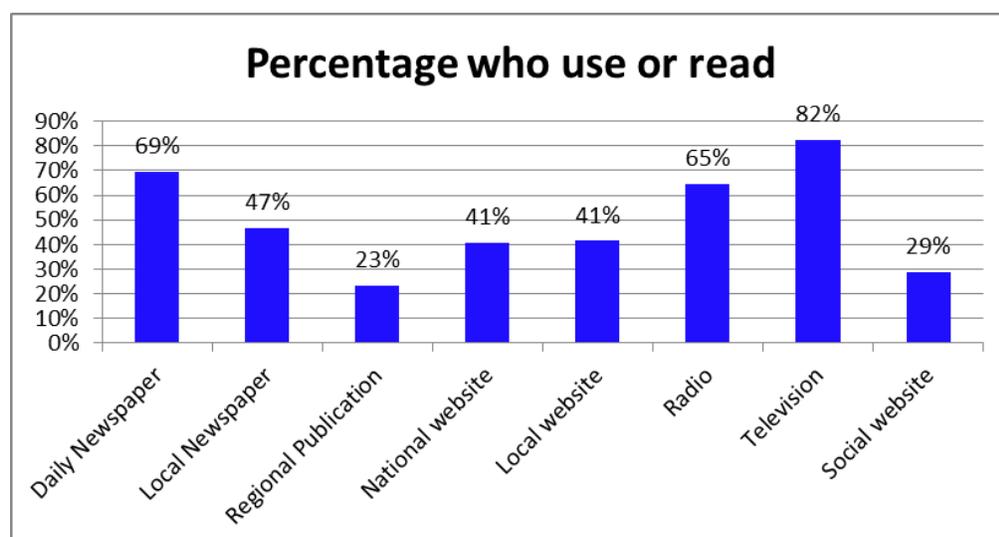
A television station?

A social media website?

The three highest usage media were television (82%), a daily newspaper (69%), and radio (65%). The next group of media were a local newspaper (47%), followed by national or local websites, each at 41%. Social websites were identified by 29% of respondents, while only 23% use regional publications.

It is clear that conventional media such as television, radio, and daily newspapers such as the Plain Dealer and the Akron Beacon Journal are primary sources of media for this demographic of NEORSD household customers. These are the most likely media outlets to use for community outreach campaigns. However, social media are used by more than a quarter of respondents, making this also a viable media tool that could be used at less cost and with specific targeting of particular customer demographics.

Figure 1.24: Customer media usage



## Section 1. G: NEORSD Survey Respondent Demographics

The survey respondent demographics are fairly representative of residents of the NEORSD service area, tilting in favor of women and older residents with higher levels of education and household income. Respondents were 67% female. 95% of respondents said that they were registered voters, which is more typical of homeowners, who were 90% of the respondents (Figure 1.25).

Figures 1.26 and 1.27 describe the makeup of respondent households. According to Figure 1.26, 37% of households had one adult, while 44% had two adults. There were 20% of respondent households with three or more adults. According to Figure 1.27, 56% of respondents had no children (under 18) living in the household. Of the remaining respondents, 34% had one or two children, and 10% had three or more children living in the household.

Figure 1.28 indicates that 21% of respondents had a graduate or professional degree, and 27% of respondents had a bachelor's degree. Those that had completed part of a college program constituted 30% of the respondents, while 18% had a high school diploma as their highest educational attainment. Only 4% had less than a high school diploma. Higher education levels correlate with the survey focusing on homeowners.

Annual household income was fairly evenly distributed, but with the majority below \$60,000/year (57%), according to figure 1.29. Of this group, 22% had household income of \$40,000 - \$60,000; 21% had household income of \$20,000 - \$40,000, and 14% were below \$20,000 per year. Incomes at or above \$100,000 per year were 14% of the sample, while households in the \$80,000 - \$100,000 range were 12% of respondents. 17% of respondents reported annual household income of \$60,000 - \$80,000.

The ethnic and racial mix of respondents was more heavily represented by Caucasian respondents when compared with data from the 2010 U.S. Census for Cuyahoga County, which is due to the survey being stratified to fully represent the percentage of NEORSD customers living in suburban communities. Table 1.30 reports that 76% of respondents identified as Caucasian, which is higher than the 66% reported in the 2010 census. The respondents included 17% who identified as African-American, which is lower than the 29% reported in the census. The remaining respondents constituted Hispanic (1%), lower than the 4% reported in the census; and Asian-American (1%), less than the 2% in the census. 5% identified as 'other,' which is the same as what was reported in the 2009 NEORSD survey, and lower than the subsequent two years (10% in 2011, 9% in 2010).

Figure 1.25: Which best characterizes your current situation? Are you a homeowner, are you renting, or are you living with a parent, relative or friend?

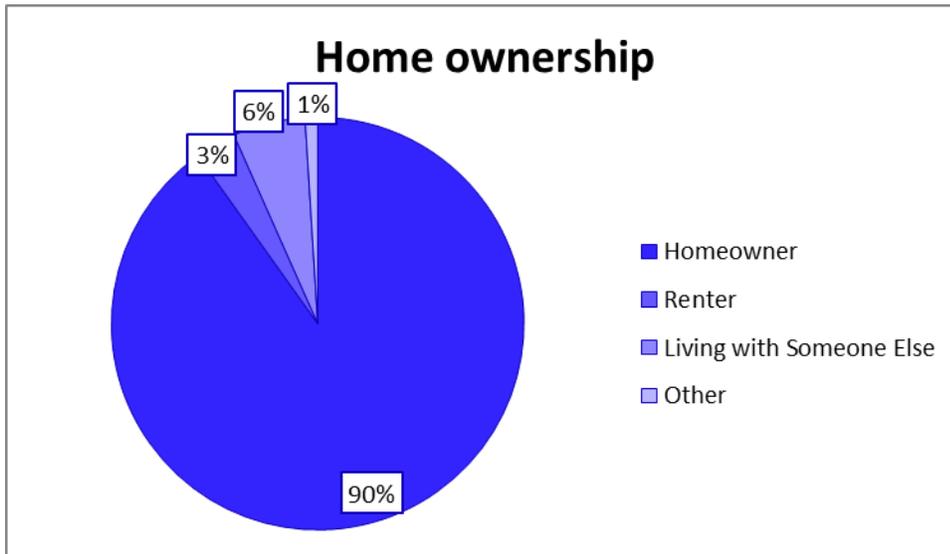


Figure 1.26: How many other people live in your household?

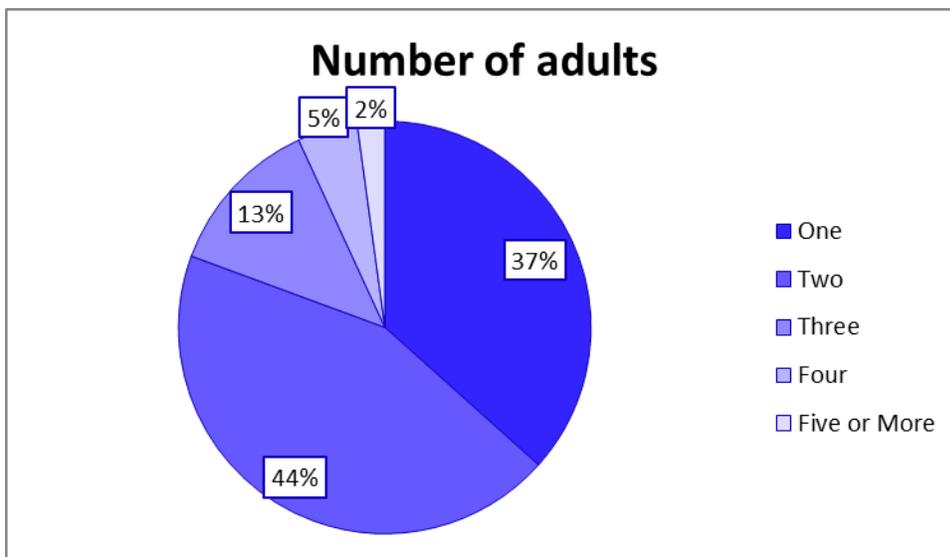


Figure 1.27: Number of Children

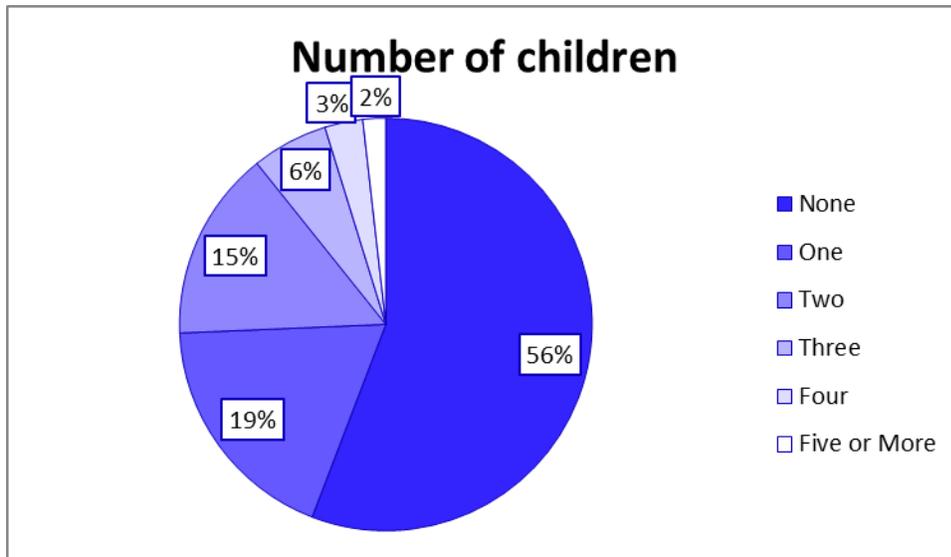


Figure 1.28: Highest level of education of respondent

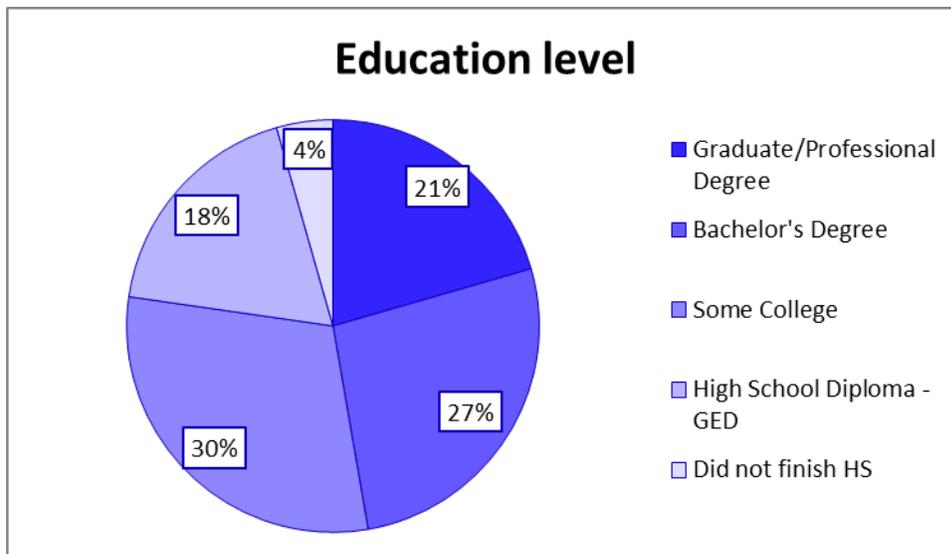


Figure 1.29: Annual household income

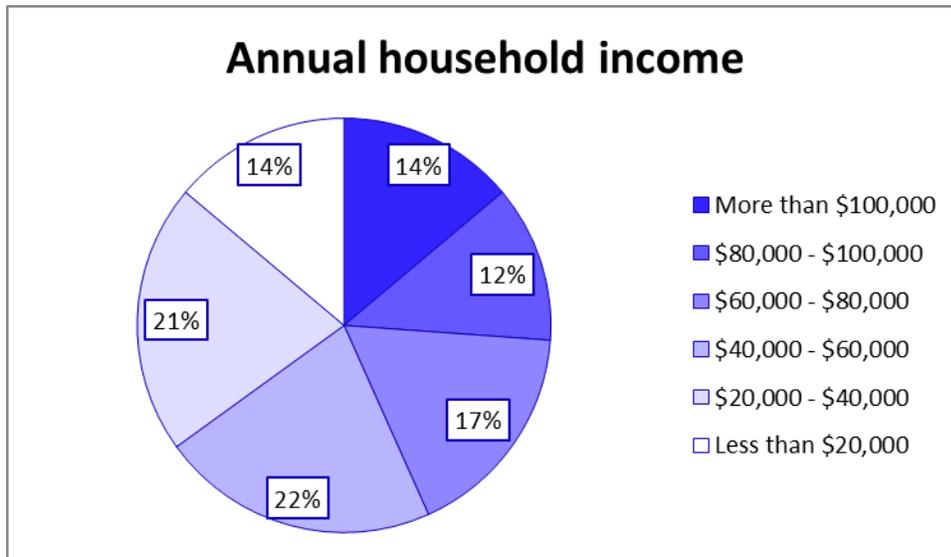
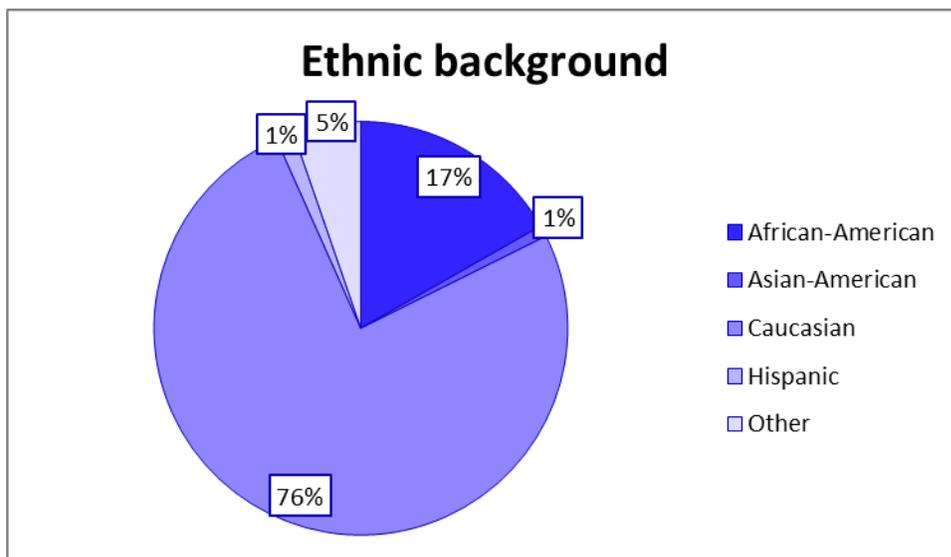


Figure 1.30: What best characterizes your ethnic background?



## Part I, Section 2: NEORSD Customer Service Center Caller Survey Results

The CRI developed a phone list of customers who had called the NEORSD Customer Service Center (CSC) at least once during the period of March 1<sup>st</sup> – July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2012. The database was stratified by number of calls made by each number. The database presented a challenge, in that many calls were made from business phone lines that listed a central number for a large organization with many employees, making it impossible to identify the specific caller. This was not surprising, as the CSC hours correspond to the standard work week of 8:30 am – 5:00 pm Monday – Friday.

Section 2 details the logistics of caller contact with the CSC, comparing their perceptions of how often respondents called with the actual database record. Respondents are then asked a series of questions about why they called, whether their problem was resolved, and if the hours of the CSC are convenient. It should be noted that the CSC gets many calls from customers who are actually seeking assistance from the Cleveland Water Department and are redirected to that number. Likewise, many callers are referred to the CSC after having first called the Cleveland Water Department seeking assistance with a sewer-related question.

As detailed in the project proposal, 316 respondents took the survey, with 302 completing the questions. This was not a sample, but rather a survey of the entire population of 1,042 individuals who were listed in the database provided by the NEORSD CSC. The 30% survey participation rate is quite high compared to the typical 5% - 10% participation rate in randomized sample surveys. Of the population of 1,042 who had contacted the NEORSD, 671 had called the CSC once, and 371 had called more than once. The survey was completed during the period of August 1<sup>st</sup> -3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

### **Section 2.A: Respondent recall of calls made to Customer Service Center**

Caller perceptions of how often they called the CSC versus what was actually recorded in the database are quite different. Figure 2.1 details the actual number of calls made by callers in the study period (March – July, 2012). 86% called once; 8% called twice, and 5% called more than twice. However, according to Figure 2.2, 74% of callers recalled having one contact, while 6% thought they had called twice, and an astonishing 20% thought they had called more than twice, a fourfold increase over the recorded 5% who called more than twice.

Further analysis of the data is found in Figures 2.3 – 2.5. Of those who actually called once (according to the CSC database), 75% agreed they had called once, while 6% thought they had called twice, and 19% thought they had called more than twice. According to Figure 2.4, those who actually called twice reported remembering calling once (75%), or more than twice (25%). *None of the respondents remembered calling twice.* Of the respondents who are on record for having called more than twice, 55% remembered only calling once, while 45% accurately remembered calling more than twice (again, none remembered calling only twice.)

It is quite clear from the survey that respondent recall is highly inaccurate when compared to the actual record of number of calls made by each respondent. One quarter of the one-time callers thought they had called more than once. While the record shows that 5% called more than twice, 20% of the respondents thought they had called more than twice. Actually calling twice had a zero response rate, compared to 25% who thought they had called more than twice, and 75% who thought they had called only once. These findings make clear that respondent recall of distant or even recent experiences with a call center are suspect at best, and should be kept in consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of a call center by use of a customer survey.

Figure 2.1: Number of times respondent called, according to NEORSD CSC database

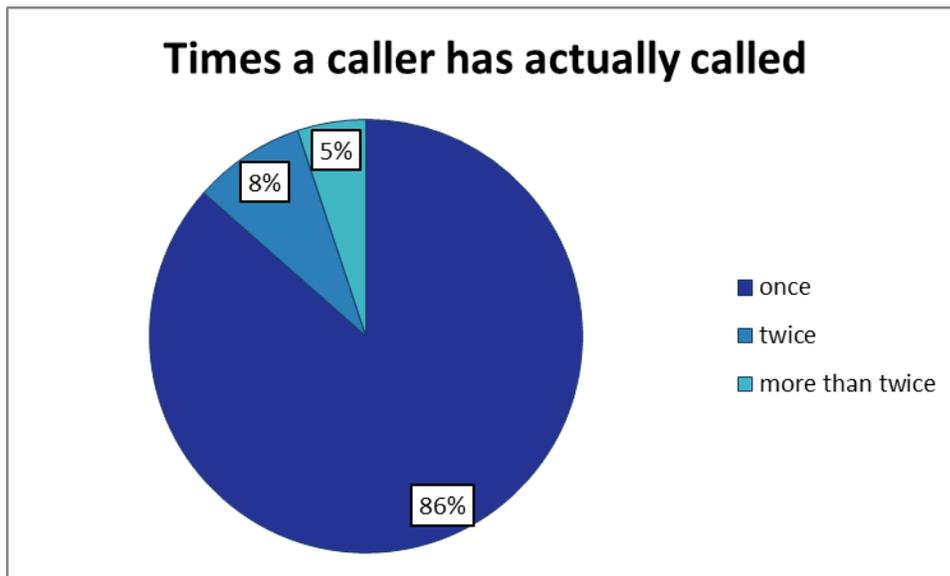


Figure 2.2: Number of times respondent says they called the CSC

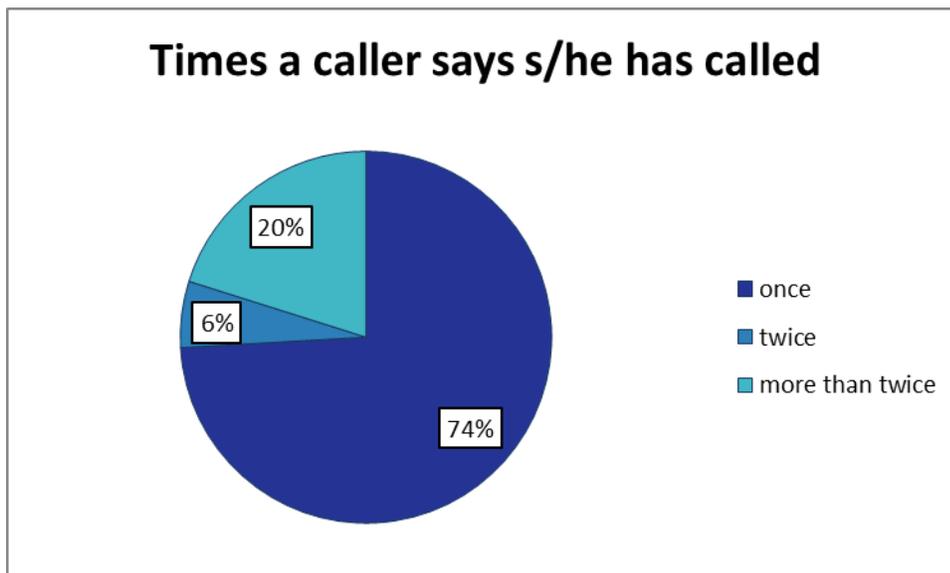


Figure 2.3: Report of respondent recall of call frequency who actually called once

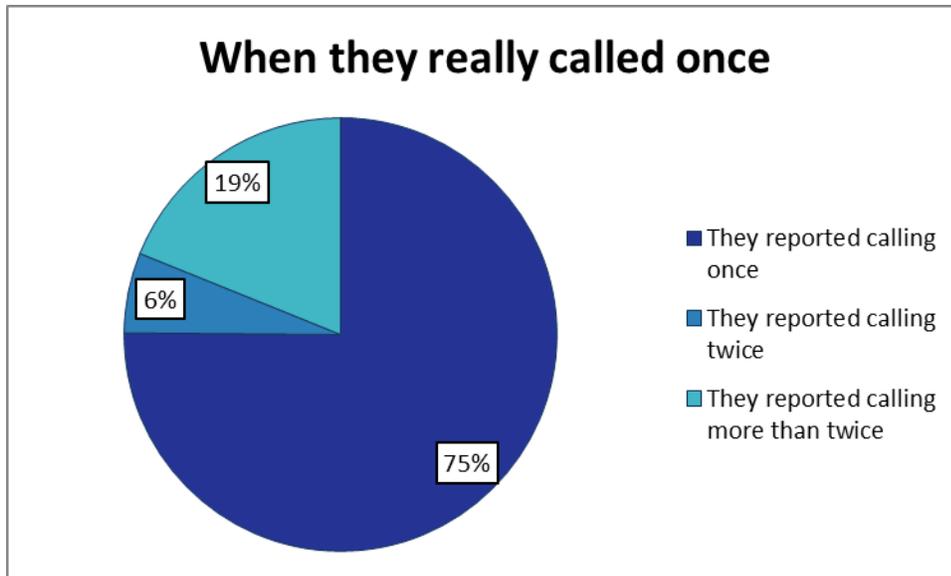


Figure 2.4: Report of respondent recall of call frequency who actually called twice

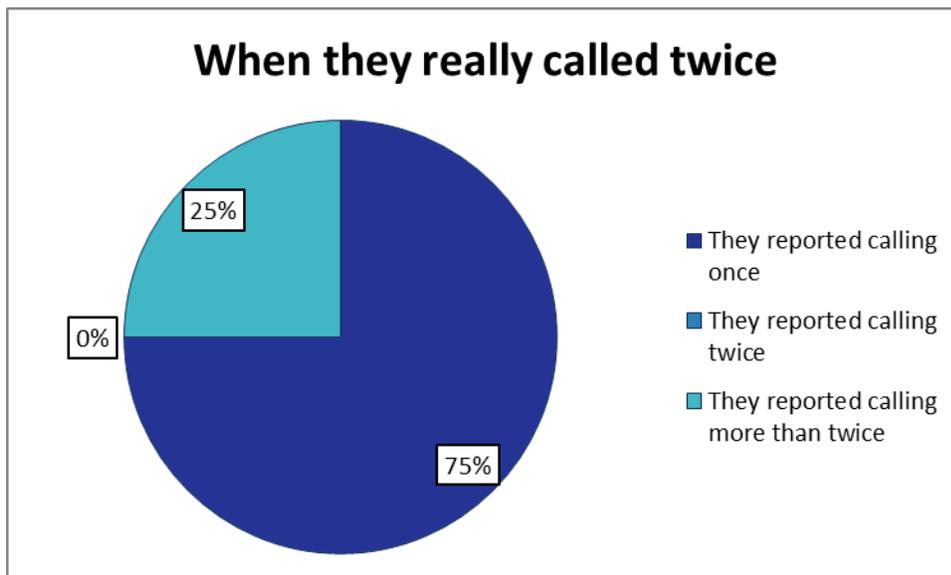
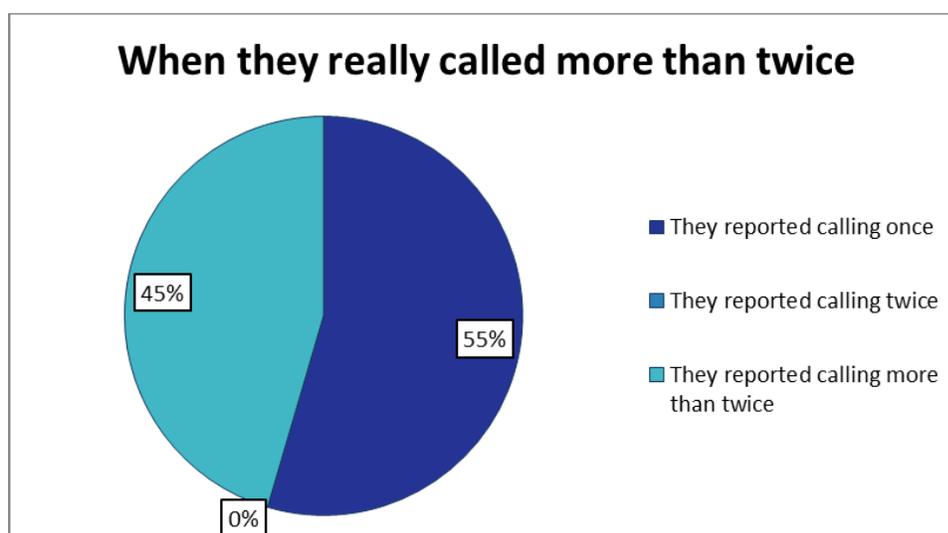


Figure 2.5: Report of respondent recall of call frequency who actually called more than twice



## Section 2.B: Customer Service Center respondent experience

Figures 2.6 – 2.16 provide information about the callers' experience with the Customer Call Center (CSC), beginning with details about the call logistics. Respondents were asked, 'Were you placed on hold?' In Figure 2.6, 36% said 'yes,' 37% said 'no,' and 27% did not remember. Respondents who said they were placed on hold were asked how long they had to wait. Figure 2.7 shows that 16% said 'less than a minute'; 30% said '1-5 minutes'; 33% said 'more than 5 minutes,' and 21% did not remember how long they were on hold.

All respondents were then asked what happened first in their call. Figure 2.8 shows that 45% said they spoke with a Customer Representative immediately. 18% said they got a short recorded message, while 8% said they heard a long recorded message. 29% did not remember what happened first in the call.

Respondents were then asked if the Customer Representative understood the reason for the call. Figure 2.9 shows that 81% said 'yes,' 4% said 'no,' 9% said 'partially,' and 6% did not know. According to Figure 2.10, 56% of respondents said their issue was resolved right away. Figure 2.11 shows data for whether respondents had to call the CSC again. 67% did not have to call back, while 31% said 'yes,' and 2% did not answer. Of those that called back, respondents were asked how many times they had to call. Figure 2.12 shows that 16% called back once, 21% called back twice, 37% called back more than twice, and 26% said their issue was still not resolved. Those who called back were asked if they were directed to the right person. According to Figure 2.13, 77% said 'yes,' 21% said 'no,' and 2% provided no answer. For respondents needing a call back from the CSC, Figure 2.14 indicates that 37% said they were called back promptly, while 57% said they had to wait, and 6% did not remember.

Figures 2.15 and 2.16 report perceptions of the convenience of CSC hours of operation. Customers appear to be satisfied with the hours being during standard business hours, with 82% saying they thought the CSC availability was convenient (Figure 2.15). When asked what hours might be more convenient, 8% preferred evening hours, while 4% preferred weekend hours. 87% said the existing schedule was convenient, making it unlikely that a change in hours of operation is necessary (Figure 2.16).

Figure 2.6: Was respondent placed on hold?

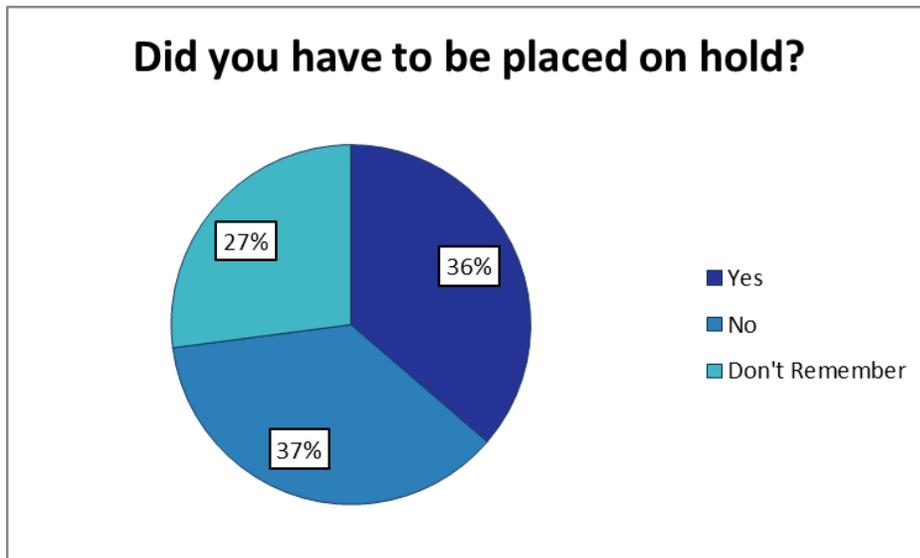


Figure 2.7: Respondent memory of wait time

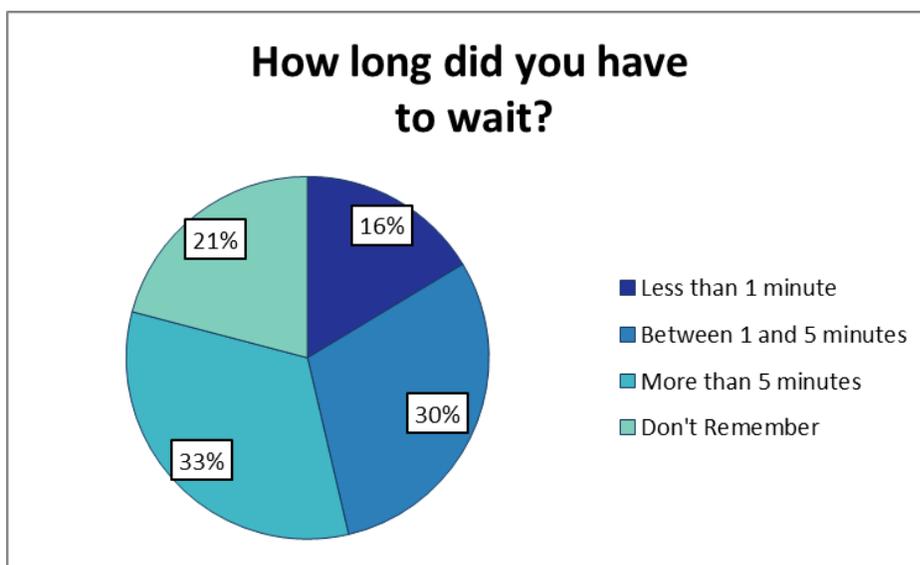


Figure 2.8: Respondent recall of what happened first during CSC call

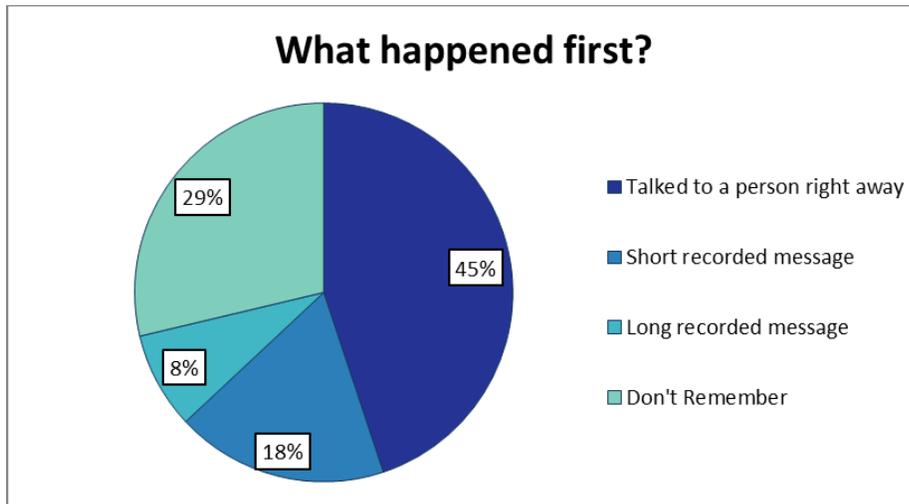


Figure 2.9: Respondent recall of whether Customer Representative understood reason for call

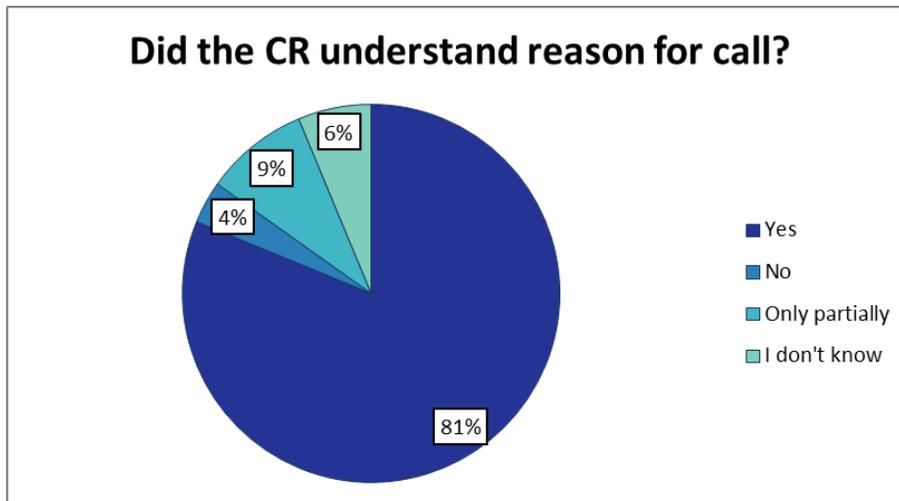


Figure 2.10: Respondent recall of whether issue was resolved quickly

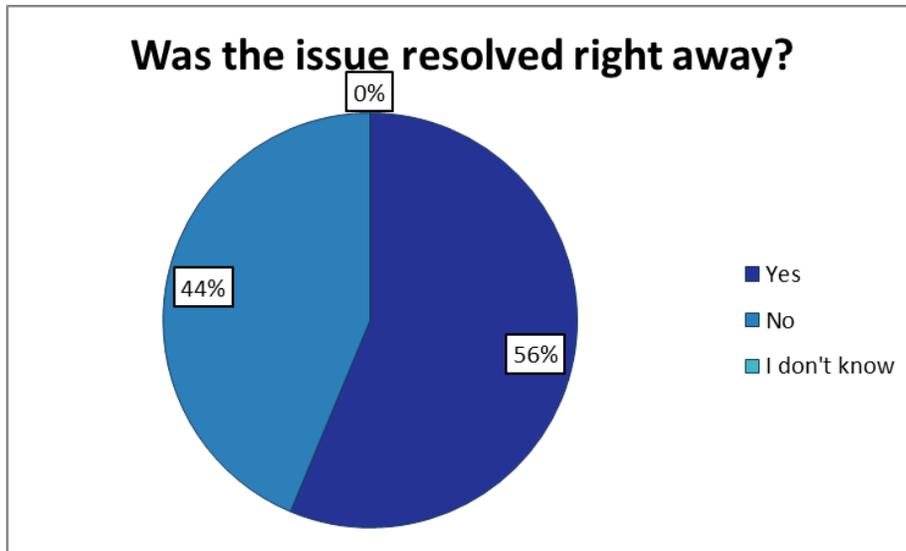


Figure 2.11: Respondent recall of needing to call CSC again

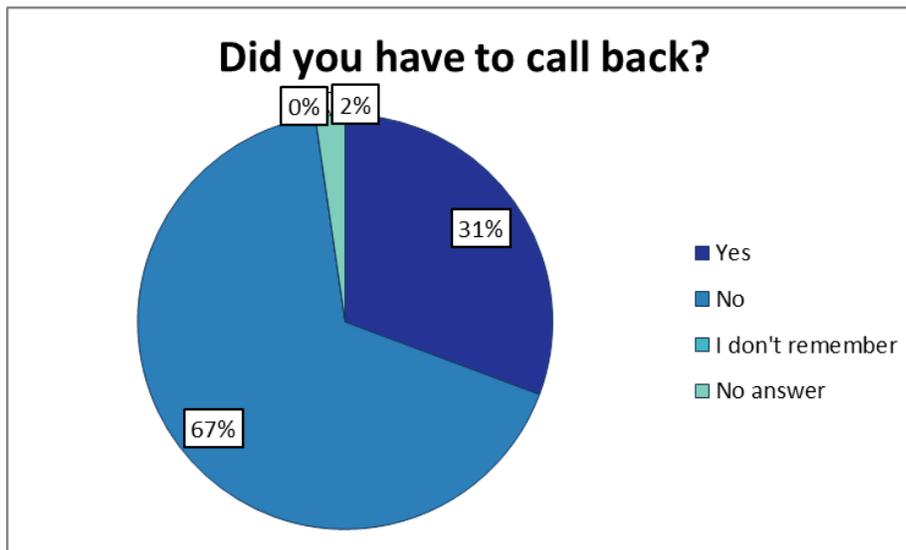


Figure 2.12: Respondent recall of how many times CSC was called

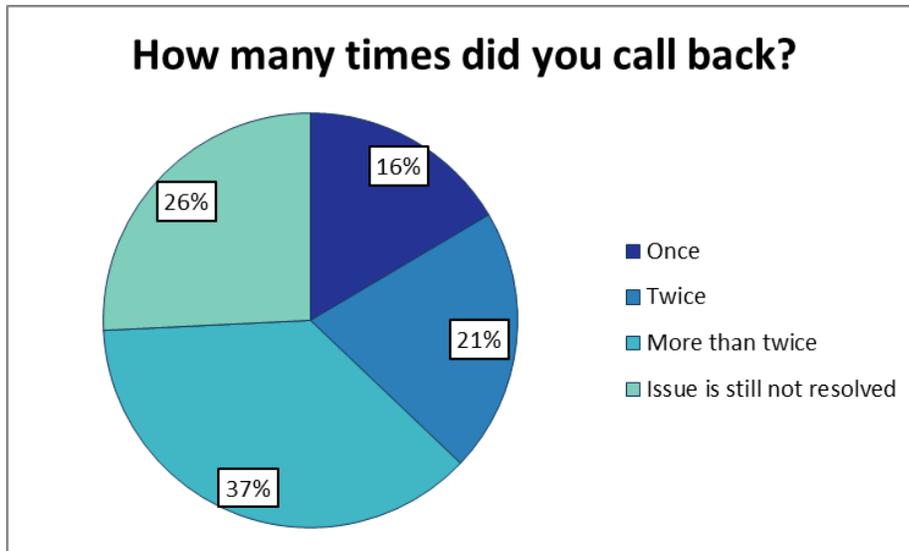


Figure 2.13: Respondent recall of being directed to the right person for assistance

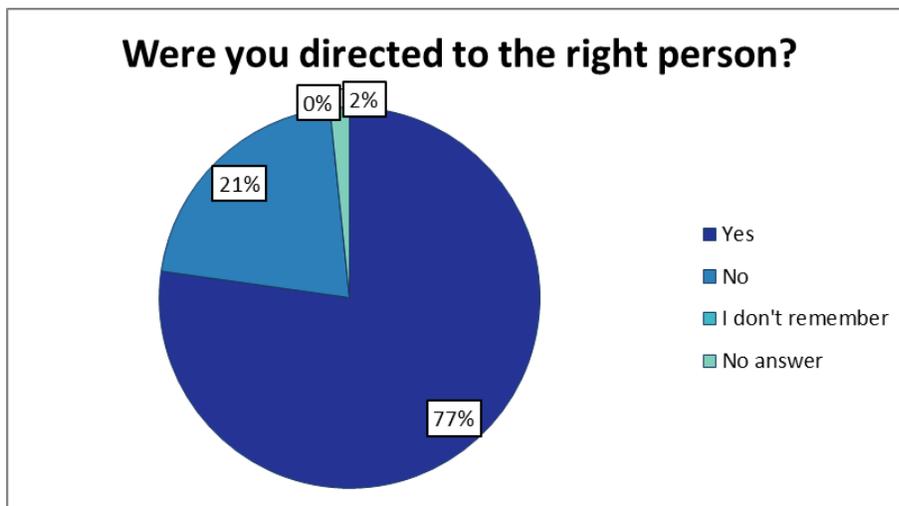


Figure 2.14: Respondent recall of being called back quickly by CSC

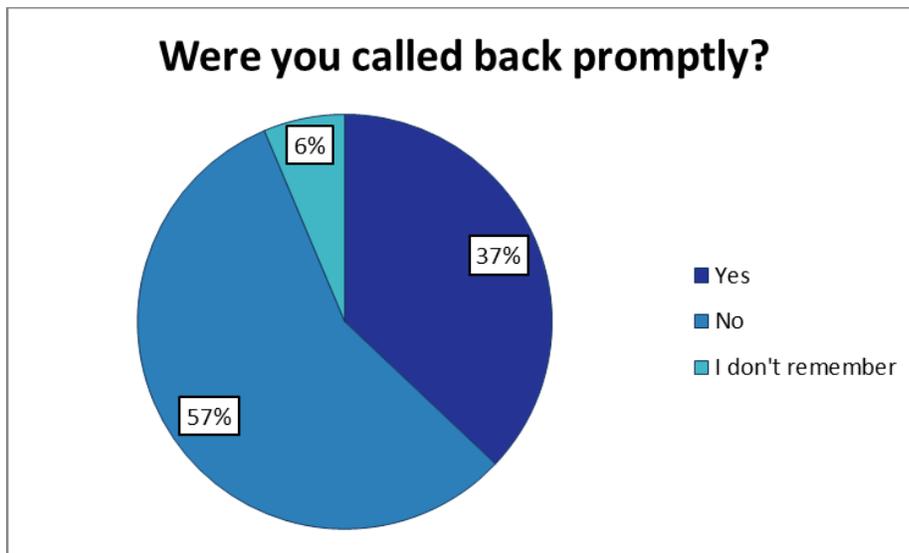


Figure 2.15: Respondent evaluation of convenience of CSC hours of operation

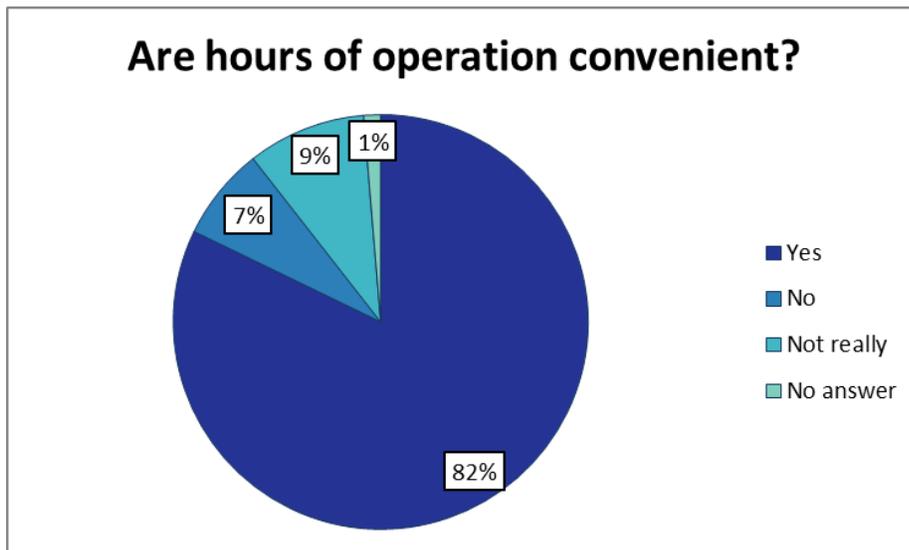
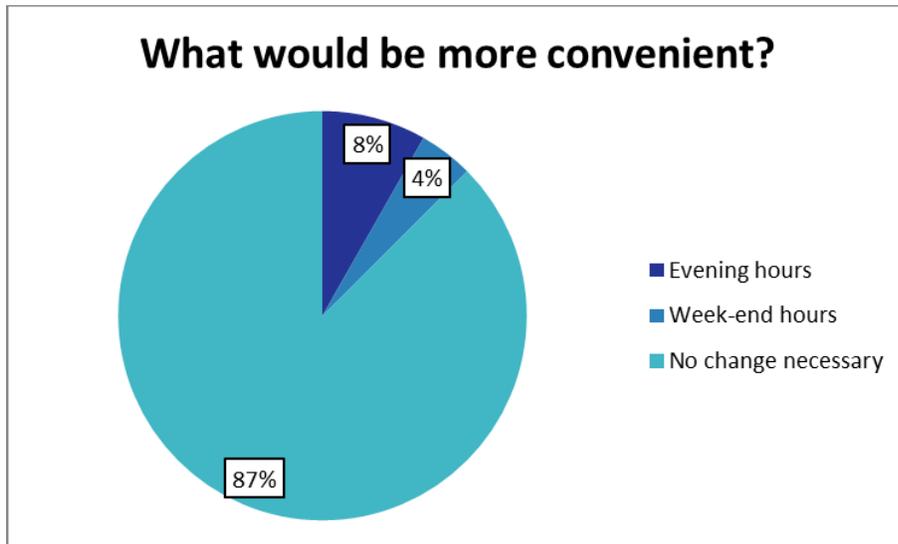


Figure 2.16: Respondent suggestions to increase convenience of CSC hours of operation



## Section 2.C: Overall quality of call to Customer Service Center

Figures 2.17 – 2.22 provide respondent ratings of the quality of the NEORSD Customer Service Center. When asked if a respondent's problem was resolved satisfactorily, 57% said yes, 17% said no, 23% said 'not yet,' 2% had given up, and 1% gave no answer (Figure 2.17).

When asked about their overall experience (Figure 2.18), 61% of respondents rated the CSC as 'excellent' or 'good,' while 19% rated their experience as 'fair' and 19% as 'poor.'

Respondents were asked to rate the CSC compared to other utility services (Figure 2.19). 22% said the CSC was better than other utility services, while 51% thought it was about the same as other utility services. 23% rated the CSC as worse than other utility services, and 4% gave no answer.

Figure 2.20 shows the ranking of four agencies in responsiveness to customers: the NEORSD, the Water Department (Cleveland), city government, and county government. The NEORSD tied with city government for the highest frequency of being ranked first at 28%. City government had the highest percentage ranking of 'second' at 36%, followed by county government at 32%, NEORSD at 28% and the Water Department at 26%. Only a few percentage points separate the four entities in the ranking for 'third': 25% gave this ranking to county government, 22% ranked city government and the Water Department third, and 20% gave this ranking to the NEORSD.

Respondents were asked to compare the NEORSD Customer Service Center to other business customer service representative services. Specifically, respondents were asked to grade the NEORSD customer service in comparison to the best customer service they had ever experienced, from any company. This is a very high standard with which to be measured, and the goal of the question was to determine how well NEORSD was rated compared to the best customer service departments in the country.

Figure 2.21 shows that 27% gave the NEORSD CSC an 'A' ranking, followed by 31% who gave it a 'B.' 16% gave the CSC a 'C,' 9% a 'D,' and 17% gave it an 'F.' The question needs some context, as comparing the NEORSD CSC to business customer service centers involves a wide array of types of customer service centers and needs. Given that most respondents are calling the CSC to resolve a problem as opposed to business call centers that handle purchasing and customer technical services, having 58% rank the CSC with an 'A' or a 'B' is an excellent rating for a public agency call center.

Figure 2.17: Respondent recall of satisfaction with problem resolution by CSC

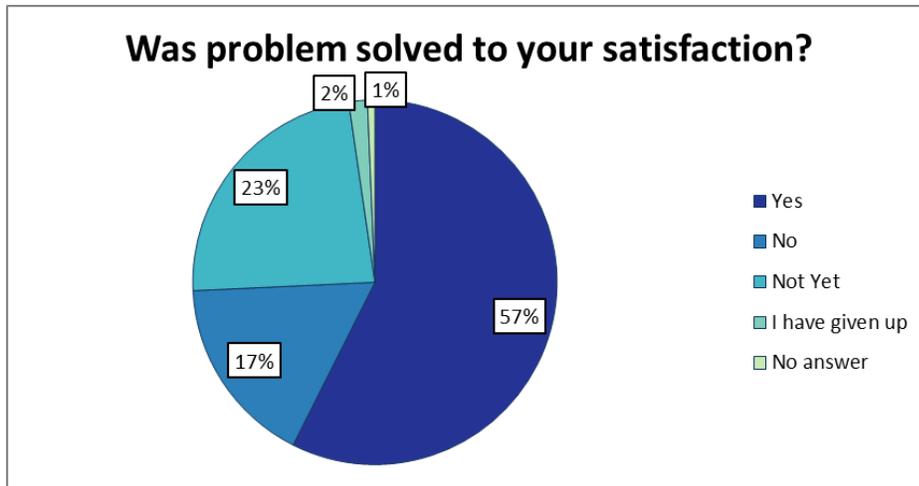


Figure 2.18: Recall of respondents' overall experience with CSC

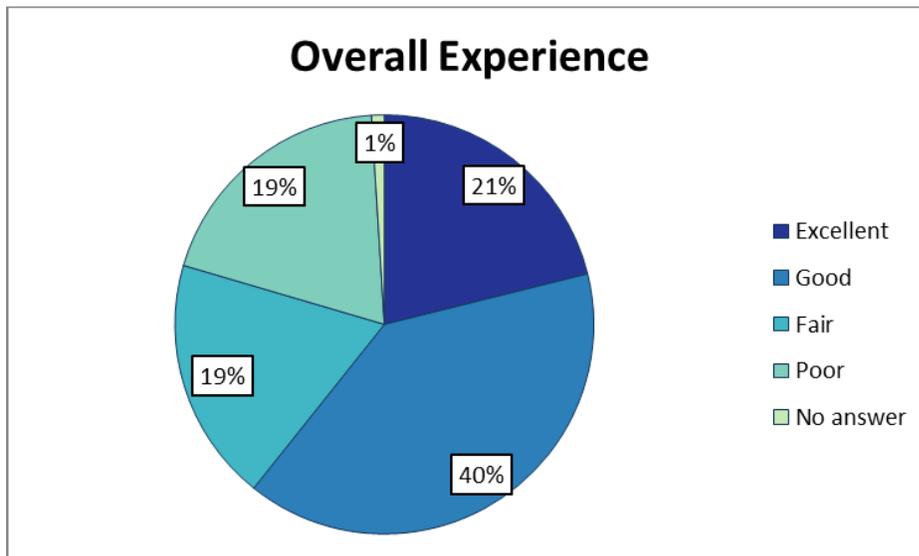


Figure 2.19: Respondents overall rating of CSC

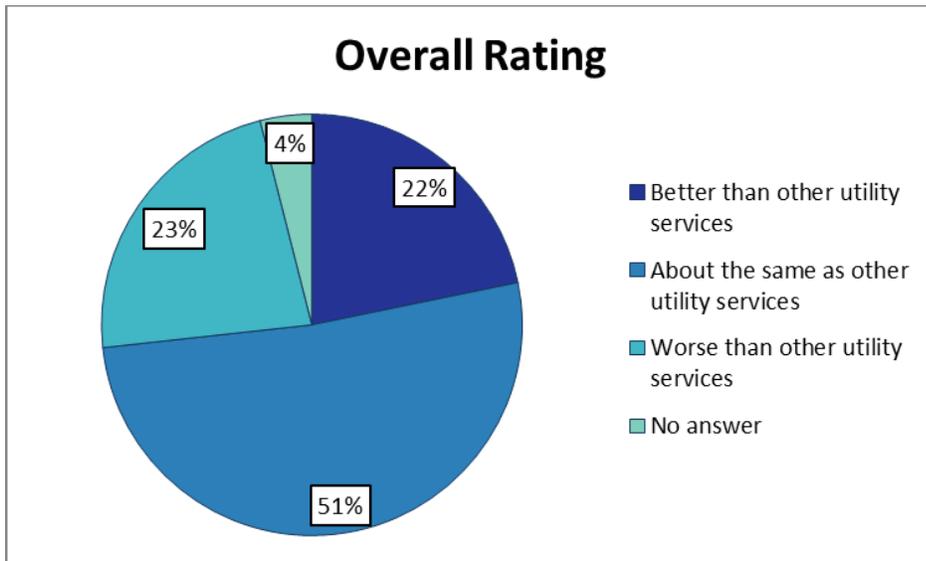


Figure 2.20: Which agency is more responsive to customers?

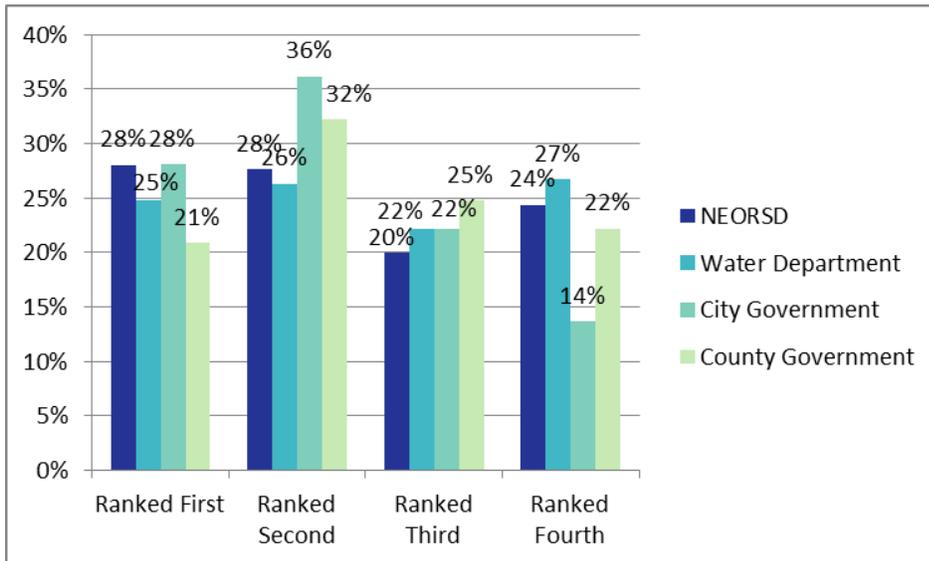
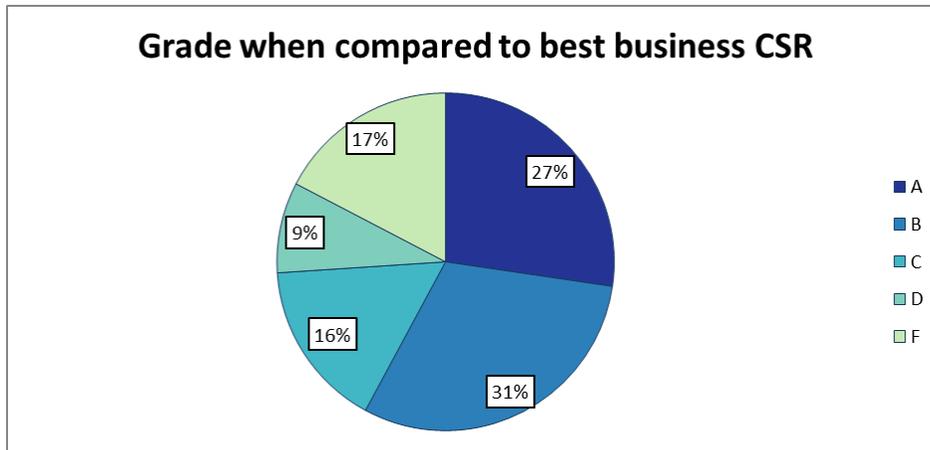


Figure 2.21: Respondent grading of NEORSD CSC compared to other business CSRs



### Part I, Section 3: Comparative Sewer District Survey Data Analysis

The study included phone surveys of household customers of three sewer districts with characteristics of interest for comparison with the data gathered from the NEORS D household customer survey. The landline phone surveys were conducted with customers served by the sewer authorities in Buffalo, NY; Milwaukee, WI, and Philadelphia, PA. The Buffalo and Milwaukee authorities were chosen because of their location on the Great Lakes (Buffalo on Lake Erie; Milwaukee on Lake Michigan). Philadelphia was selected as a comparative sewer authority because of its reputation for community awareness and engagement, as well as the size of its service area (the Philadelphia Water Department, which includes the sewer authority, serves a population of one million in the city of Philadelphia, which parallels the one million customers served by the NEORS D). The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer Authority (MMSA) is closer to the NEORS D in its service geography, in that it serves both the city of Milwaukee and 28 neighboring suburban communities. The service population of the MMSA is 1.2 million. As discussed in the project study methodology, the surveys of Buffalo, Milwaukee and Philadelphia sampled 200 respondents for each area. At a 90% confidence interval with a 30% distribution, this means a 5.3% margin of error for each of the samples.

The survey data is presented in a series of comparative charts. Analysis of each set of data charts precedes the data presentation. Section 3.A details the results of what customer respondents chose as priorities for their respective regions: keeping waterways clean for recreation and as sources of drinking water; prevention of street and basement flooding; and keeping water and sewer rates affordable. Section 3.B., 3.C, 3.D, and 3.E provide data about which public agencies respondents think are responsible for addressing the priorities discussed in Section 3.A. Each of these sections provides a standardized list of public agencies and asks respondents which of the agencies listed do they think is responsible for addressing the particular priority (respondents could list as many agencies as they thought were relevant for each of the questions.) The agencies listed are as follows:

- the federal EPA (Environmental Protection Agency);
- the state EPA (or its equivalent);
- the local Water Department;
- the local Sewer District;
- suburban municipal government (except for Buffalo and Philadelphia, where only the central city government provides sewer and water service);
- central city governments of Buffalo, Cleveland, and Milwaukee (Philadelphia municipal government is the only local governing body affecting residents of the city sewer authority; separate question was not asked);
- local county government (except for Philadelphia, which has no county government separate from the Philadelphia municipal government).

Section 3.F reports data concerning respondent awareness of the level of treatment of stormwater and waste water in each of the four survey areas. Section 3.G reports respondent perceptions about the customer service responsiveness of each of the agencies listed above. This data parallels the data in Section 3.H, which reports customer respondent evaluations of their local

water and sewer authorities. Section 3.I reports respondent media usage and recognition of campaign phrases used by area sewer authorities and other local and national campaigns. Section 3 concludes with reporting of the respondent demographics for each of the four survey areas in Section 3.J.

### **Section 3.A: Customer priorities**

Customers in the four sewer district regions had similarly high ratings for the importance of keeping waterways clean for recreational use and as sources of drinking water. Similar ratings were also found for the importance of keeping water and sewer rates affordable. Lower ratings in importance were given to the priority of preventing street and basement flooding. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 shows that all four regions give first priority to keeping waterways clean for recreational use and as a source of drinking water. 93% of Cleveland and Buffalo respondents ranked recreational use as a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ concern, followed by Milwaukee residents with 91%. Figure 3.2 shows that 95% of Cleveland, 97% of Buffalo, and 93% of Milwaukee area residents ranked keeping waterways clean for drinking water as ‘very important’ or ‘important’ concerns. (Philadelphia is not included because the waterways are not used for recreation except for boating; also, the source of drinking water for Philadelphia is outside of its sewer authority service area).

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 indicate parallel results. Figure 3.5 shows that the priority of keeping area rivers clean for recreational use is considered ‘very important’ or ‘important’ by 90% of Cleveland, 91% of Milwaukee, and 88% of Philadelphia area residents. (The Niagara River in Buffalo is not considered usable for recreational purposes, and so was excluded in this question.) Keeping rivers clean for drinking water usage was ranked as ‘very important’ or ‘important’ by 95% of Cleveland, 97% of Buffalo, 93% of Milwaukee, and 92% of Philadelphia area residents in Figure 3.6.

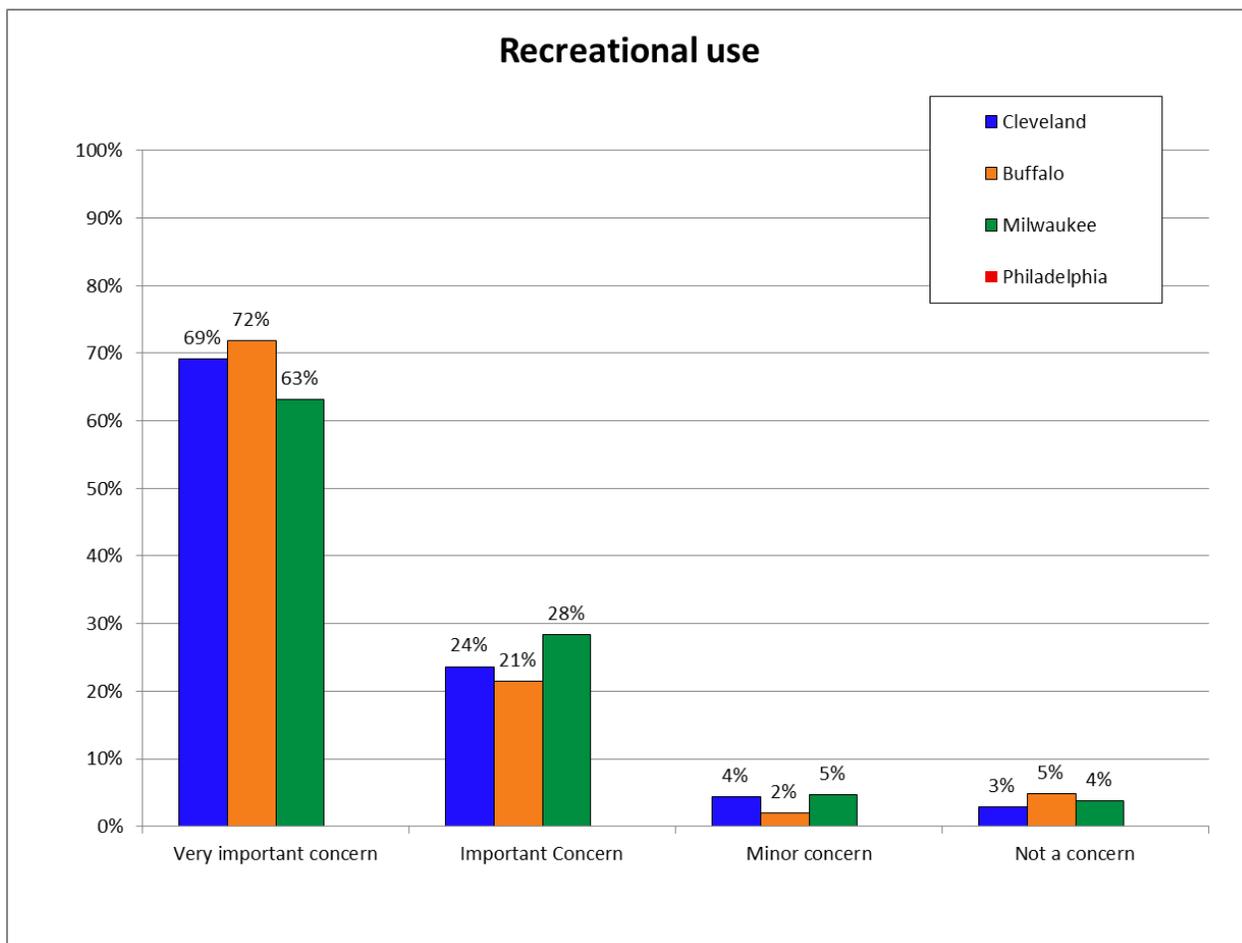
Similarly high ratings are given to the importance of affordable water and sewer rates. Figure 3.7 shows that between 90% and 95% of residents in the four regions consider affordable water rates to be a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ concern. Keeping sewer rates affordable was considered ‘very important’ or ‘important’ by 87% of Philadelphia, 90% of Milwaukee, 93% of Cleveland, and 94% of Buffalo area residents.

The lowest priority was given to prevention of street and basement flooding. Figure 3.3 shows that street flooding is considered a ‘very important’ or ‘important’ concern by 64% of Buffalo, 66% of Cleveland, 70% of Milwaukee, and 74% of Philadelphia residents. Very similar results were found concerning the importance of preventing basement flooding. Figure 3.4 shows that the same percentages in Buffalo and Cleveland marked this as ‘very important’ or ‘important’ (64% and 66% respectively), while 75% of residents in the Milwaukee and Philadelphia service areas provided this ranking.

There are no statistically significant differences in the results. It is clear that keeping waterways, lakes, and rivers in all four service areas is a high priority, with only a maximum four point difference in ratings on any of the four questions related to this issue. Affordability is also

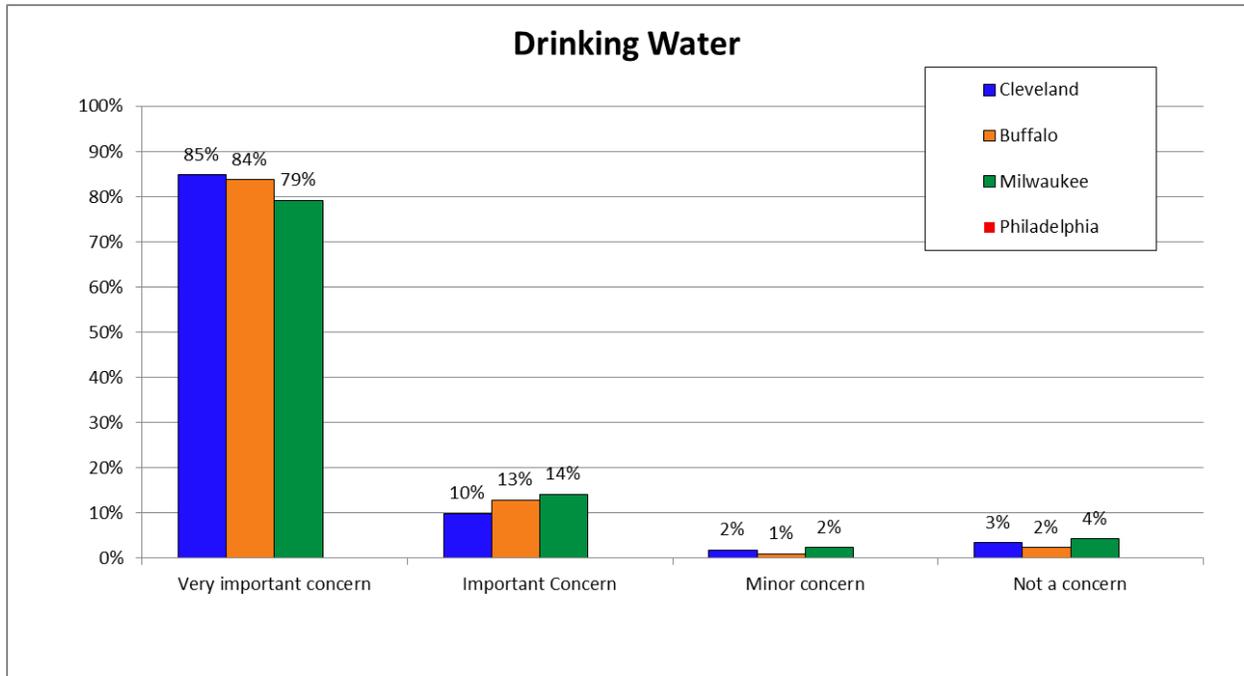
highly valued, ranging from 87% of Philadelphia residents who consider affordable sewer rates important to 95% of Cleveland area residents who chose affordability of water rates as important.

Figure 3.1: Keeping waterways clean for recreational use



Note: none of the waterways served by the Philadelphia Water Department are used for recreation, except for boating.

Figure 3.2: Keeping waterways clean as a source of drinking water



Note: Philadelphia was not included in this question, because water is drawn from groundwater tables and waterways outside of the sewer authority service area.

Figure 3.3: Minimizing the chance of street flooding in my neighborhood

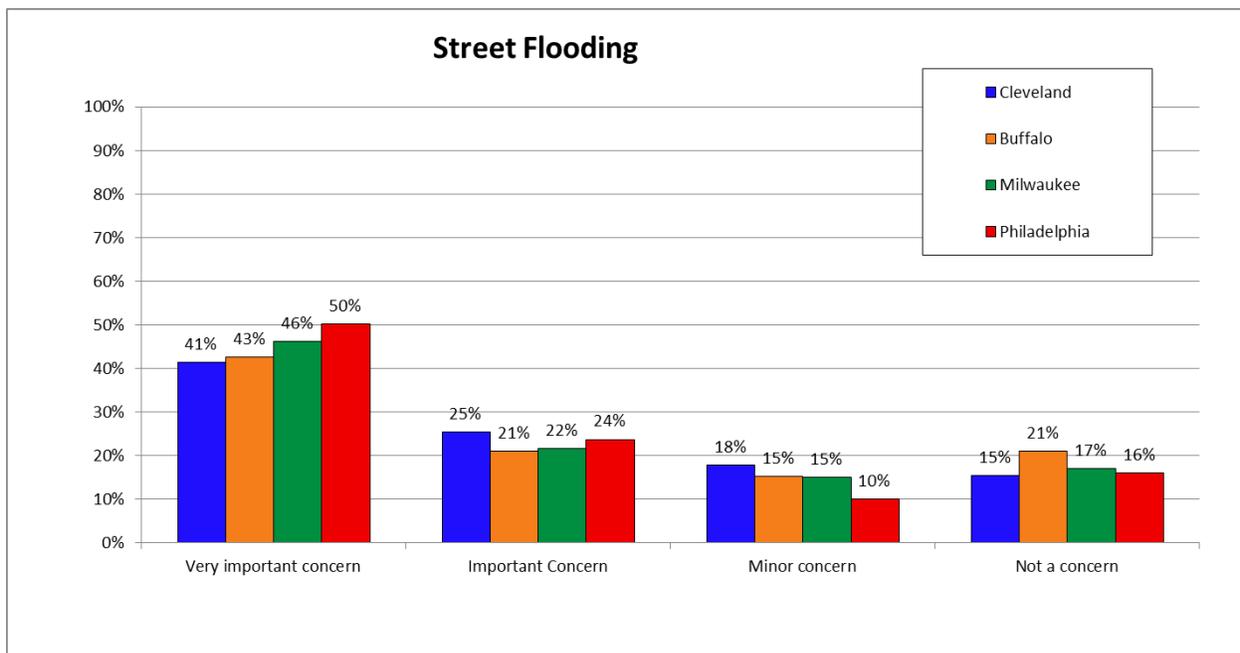


Figure 3.4: Minimizing the chance of basement flooding in my neighborhood

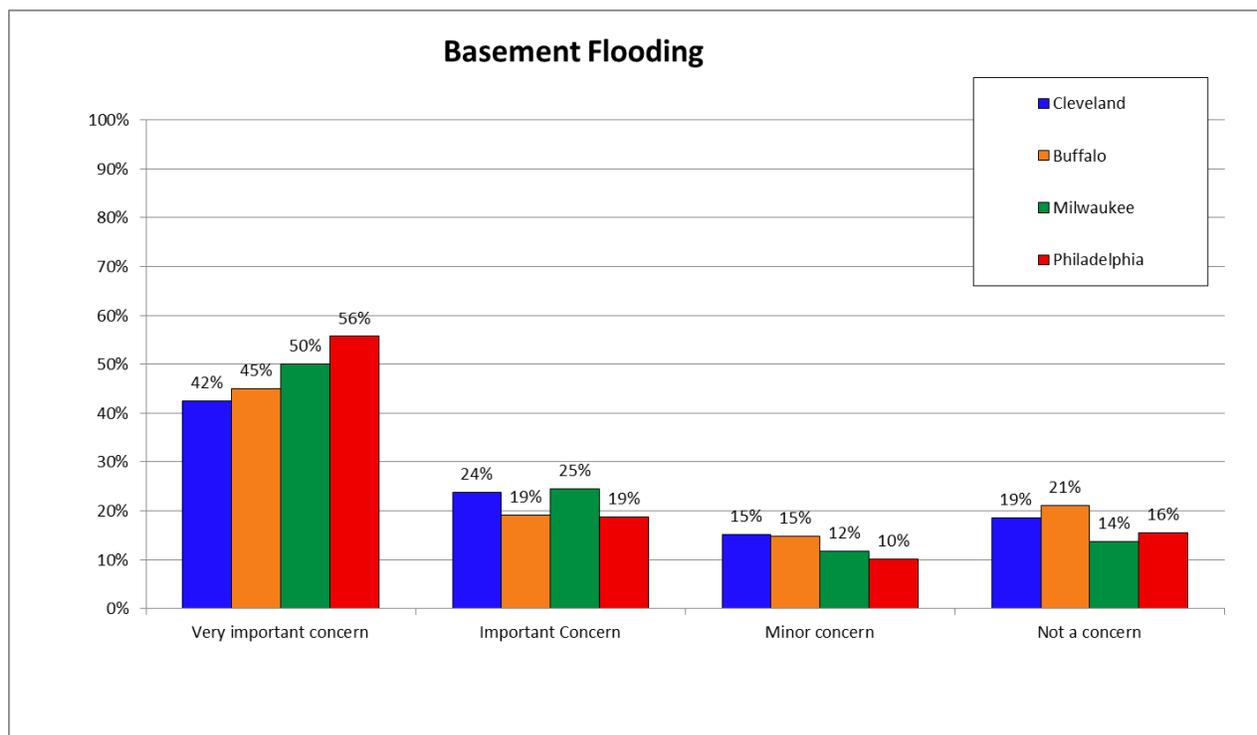
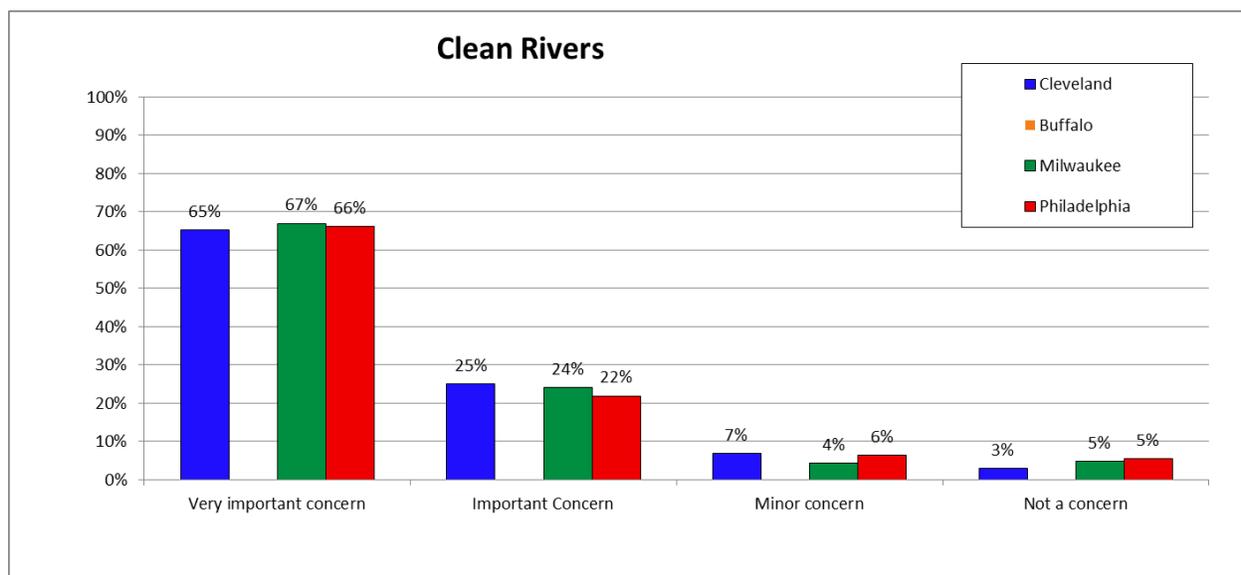


Figure 3.5: Keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use



Note: Buffalo survey did not include this question; did not apply to the city sewer authority.

Figure 3.6: Maintaining the quality of our drinking water

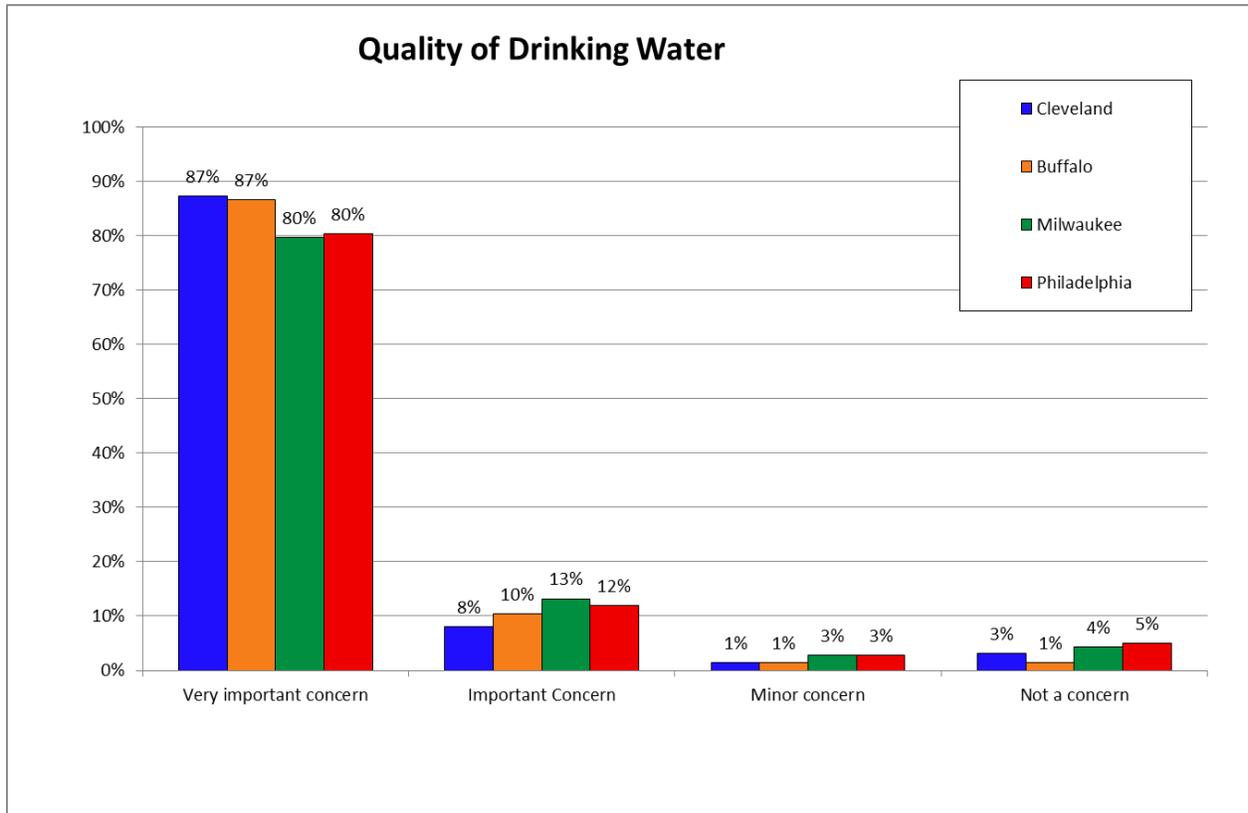


Figure 3.7: Keeping water rates/service affordable

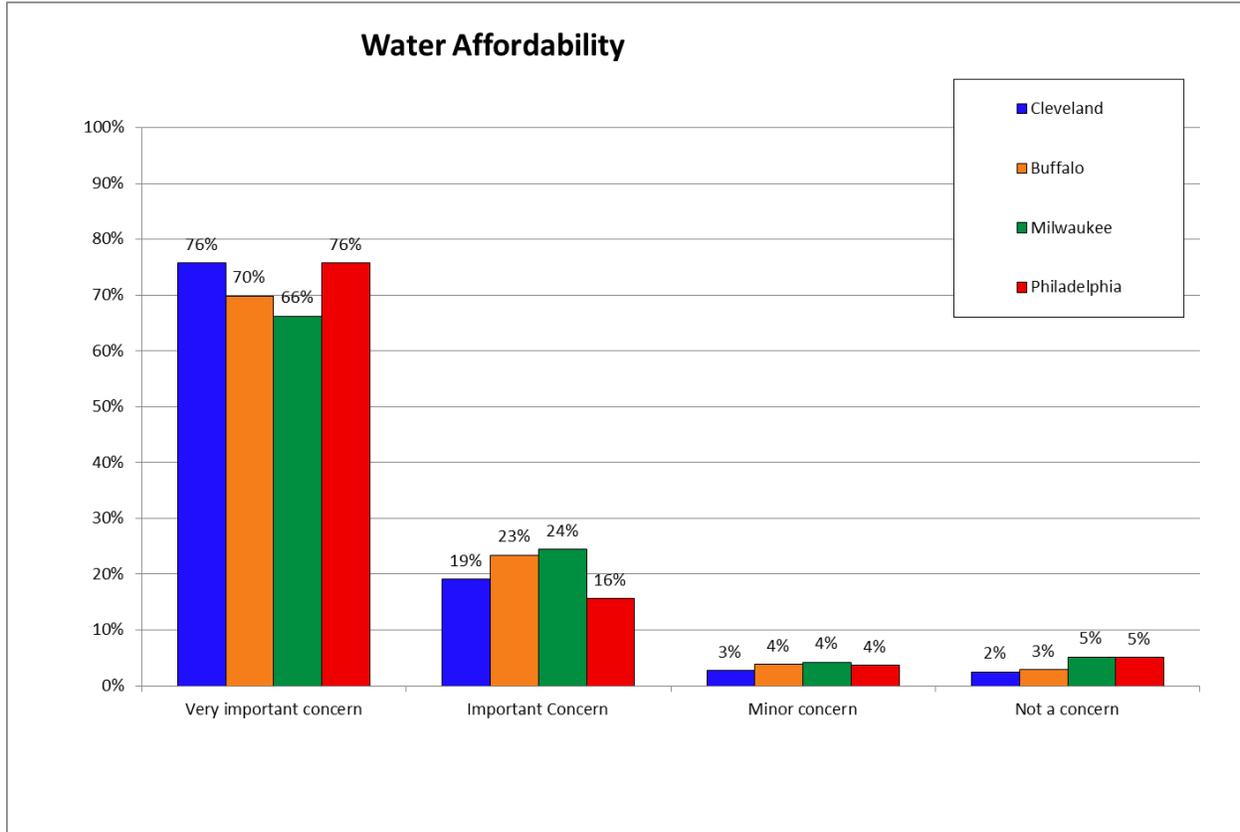
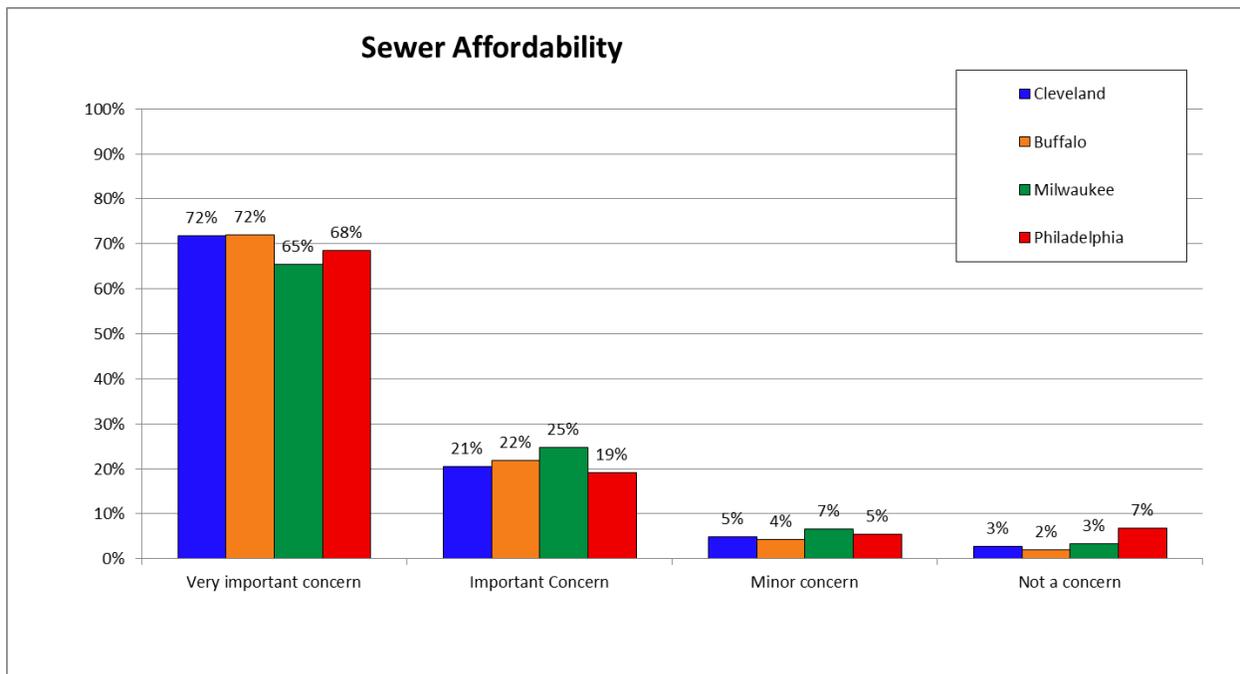


Figure 3.8: Keeping sewer service affordable



### **Section 3.B: Customer identification of public agencies responsible for keeping waterways clean**

Customers in each of the sewer district service areas were asked two versions of the following question: ‘Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to keep area lakes, rivers and streams clean?’ In the first iteration of the question, respondents were asked to name as many agencies as they could think of that they thought were responsible (unaided recall). Respondents were then asked the question again, but provided with a list of agencies, and asked, ‘Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.’ Data for unaided recall of agencies is found in Figures 3.09 – 3.11. The aided recall customer responses are provided in separate figures for each agency (3.12 – 3.18), enabling comparison of the levels of recognition across the four sewer authorities. The agencies listed in the surveys were as follows: the federal EPA (Environmental Protection Agency); the state EPA (or its equivalent); the local Water Department; the local Sewer District; suburban municipal government; central city government (e.g., the municipal governments of Buffalo, Cleveland, Milwaukee, or Philadelphia); and local county government.

#### **Section 3.B.1: Unaided recall of public agency responsibilities**

For unaided recall about which agencies are responsible for keeping waterways clean (Figure 3.9), Cleveland had the lowest level of ‘no answer’ at 35%, compared with 41% in Milwaukee, 44% in Buffalo, and 48% in Philadelphia. Only 9% of respondents identified the NEORSD as being responsible for helping to keep waterways clean. This was matched by the responses in Milwaukee, while there were higher levels of recognition among respondents in Buffalo (13%) and Philadelphia (17%) for their respective sewer departments.

Figure 3.10 shows the unaided responses to the question, ‘Which agencies are responsible for preventing polluted water from flowing into the main body of water (e.g., Lake Erie)?’ Again, between 30% (Cleveland) and 41% (Buffalo) had no answer. Of those that answered, Philadelphia had the highest percentage of accurate responses with 22% naming the sewer authority. Only 10% in Buffalo, 9% in Milwaukee, and 8% in Cleveland named the sewer authority. Surprisingly, 23% of Cleveland respondents named the Water department as being responsible, followed by 21% of Milwaukee, 8% of Buffalo, and 4% of Philadelphia respondents. A somewhat accurate response (at least as far as having indirect influence over pollution control) naming federal and state EPAs was found among 28% of Cleveland respondents, followed by 16% of Philadelphia, 15% of Buffalo, and 9% of Milwaukee.

Figure 3.11 asked respondents which agency is responsible for keeping pollution out of streams (the question was not asked in the Milwaukee survey.) Again, EPAs led the responses, with 28% of Cleveland, 17% of Buffalo, and 15% of Philadelphia respondents giving this answer. Only 16% of Philadelphia, 8% of Buffalo, and 4% of Cleveland named the sewer authority as being responsible. Municipal government was named by 21% of Philadelphia respondents, followed by 14% of Buffalo and 13% of Cleveland respondents. Those that answered ‘don’t know’ ranged from 30% of Cleveland to 38% of Philadelphia respondents.

Figure 3.9: What agency is responsible for keeping (the main body of water) clean?

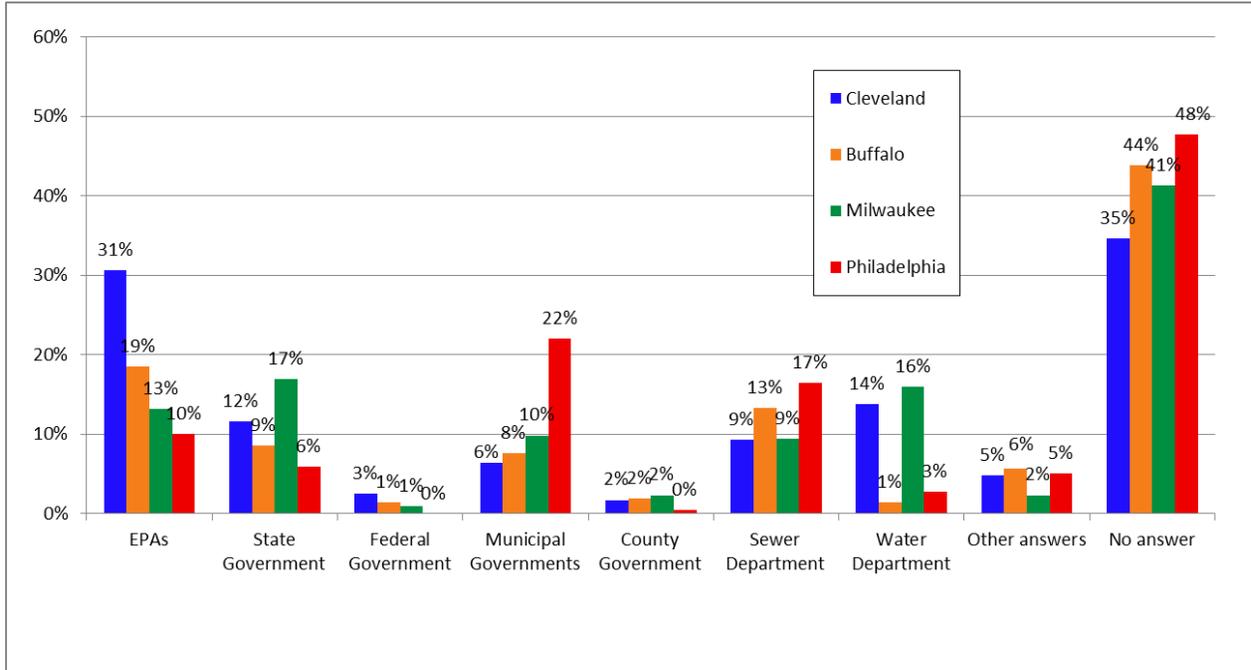


Figure 3.10: What agency is responsible for keeping polluted water from flowing into (main body of water)?

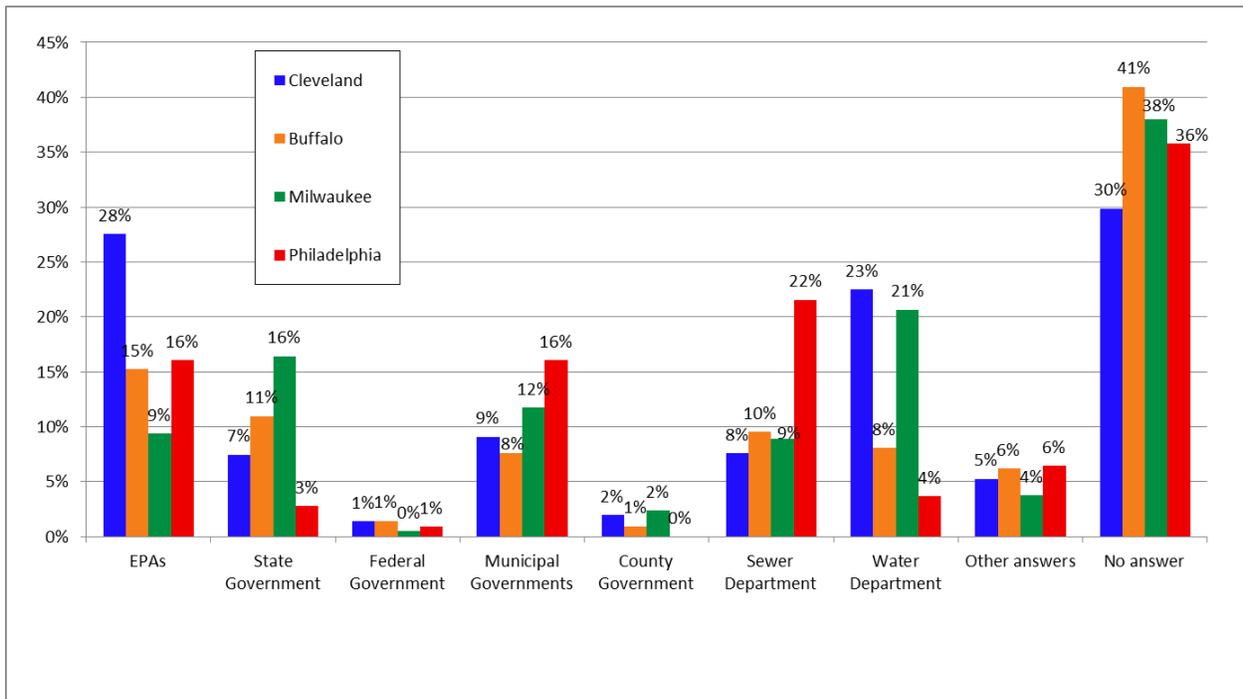
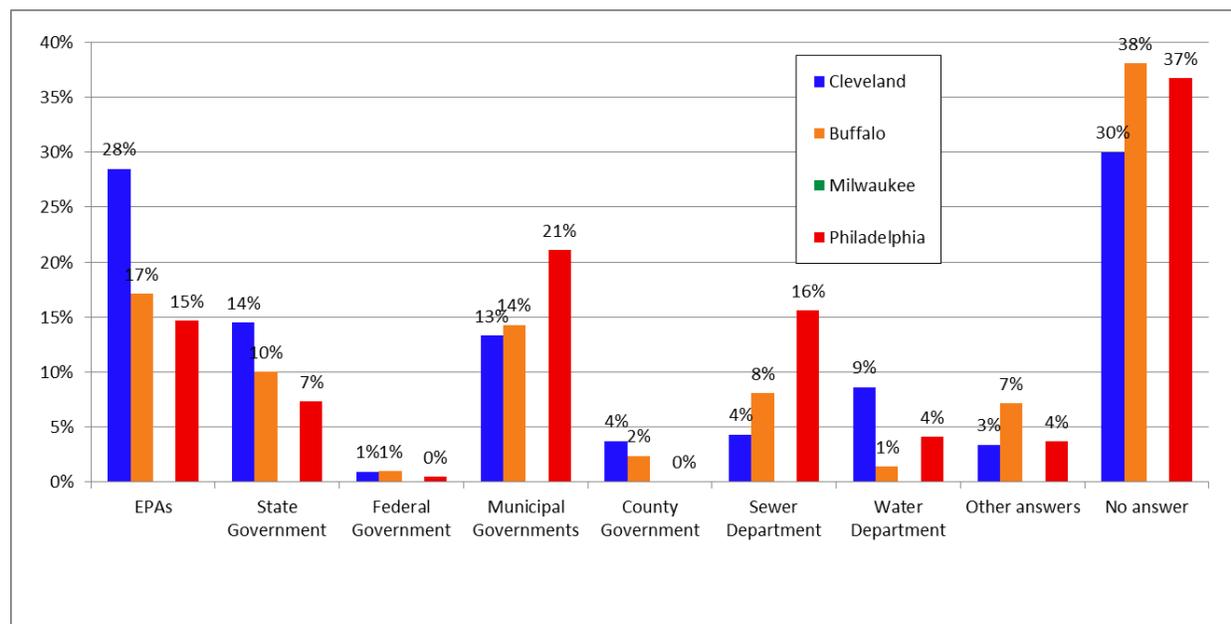


Figure 3.11: Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for keeping local streams free from pollution?



It is clear from the data presented in Figures 3.09 – 3.11 that respondents across the four sewer district regions have low levels of accurate awareness of which agencies are responsible for the cleanliness of area lakes and waterways. Responses with aided recall jump significantly, as demonstrated in the following section.

### Section 3.B.2: Aided identification of responsible agencies

Figures 3.12 – 3.18 show the responses in the four regions concerning which agencies are responsible for addressing the cleanliness of waterways when specific agency names are mentioned in the survey. Analyzing by community, NEORSD respondents chose the state EPA first (81%), followed by the NEORSD (76%), and the federal EPA (73%). Buffalo residents chose the federal EPA first (77%), followed by the state EPA (75%) and the Buffalo sewer authority (74%). Milwaukee residents identified the state EPA first (76%), followed closely by their sewer authority (75%), and the water department (72%). Philadelphia residents chose the state EPA first (78%), followed by the federal EPA (73%) and tied together the water and sewer authority (each at 71%), which may in part be due to both services being provided by the Philadelphia Water Department.

Federal and state EPAs get first or second most frequent identification by respondents in all four regions, due perhaps to waterway cleanliness being perceived as an environmental issue, and therefore the responsibility of an agency with ‘environment’ as part of its title. Residents in the NEORSD region and in Milwaukee were the only communities to identify their sewer district

second, while Buffalo and Philadelphia residents put their sewer authorities third in frequency of responses.

The frequencies of choice of suburban and/or central city or county governments were lower, ranging from 52% of NEORSD respondents identifying suburban government up to 70% of Buffalo respondents identifying county government as responsible for cleanliness of waterways.

Figure 3.12: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: Federal EPA

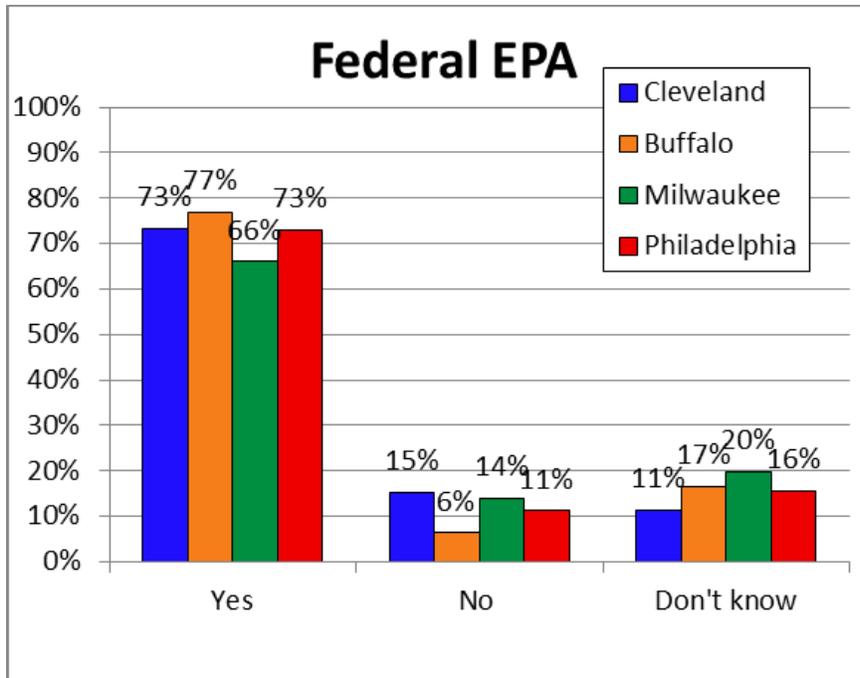


Figure 3.13: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: State EPA

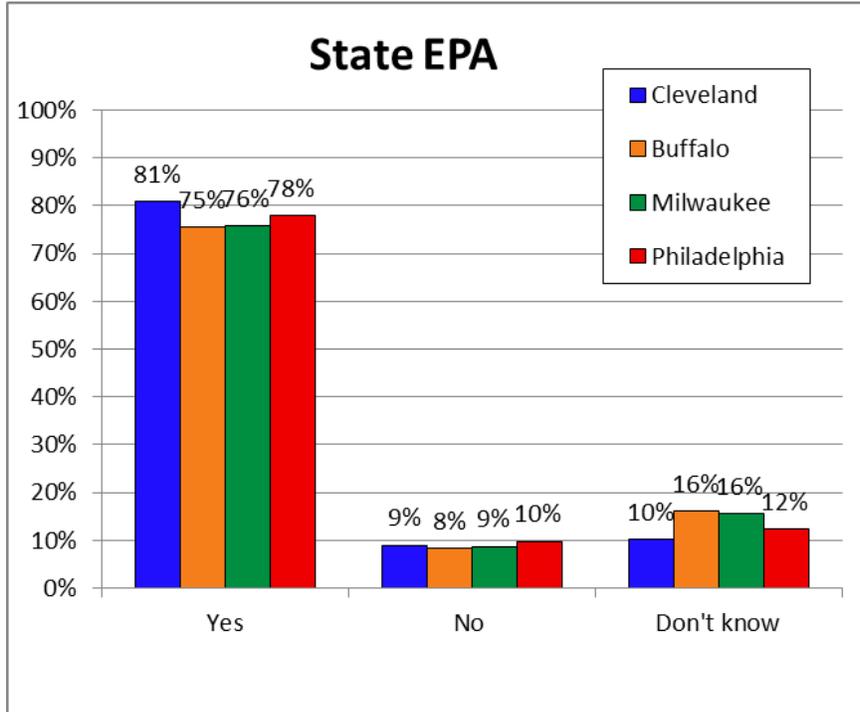


Figure 3.14: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: Water Department

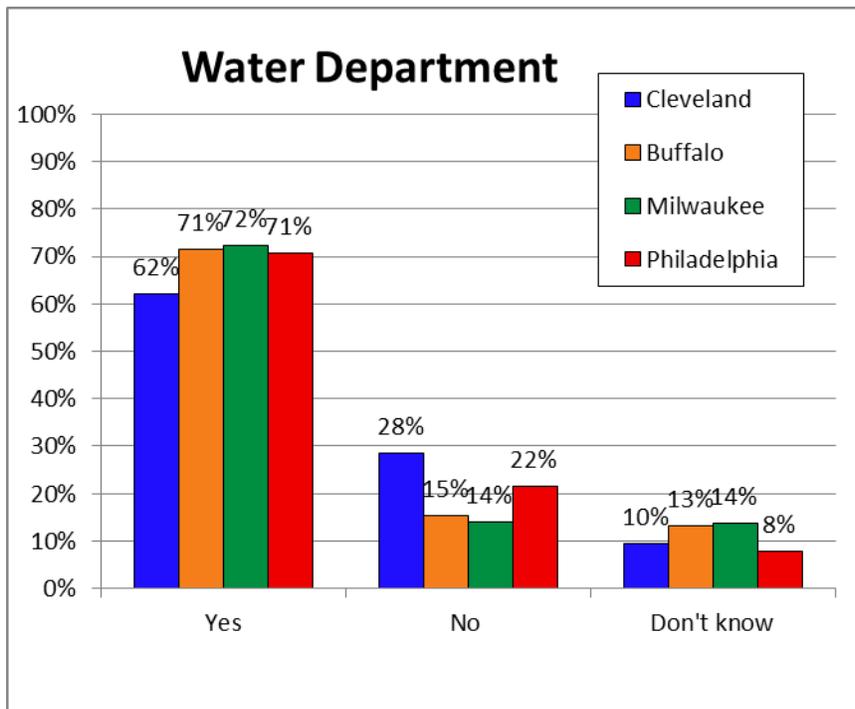


Figure 3.15: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: Sewer District

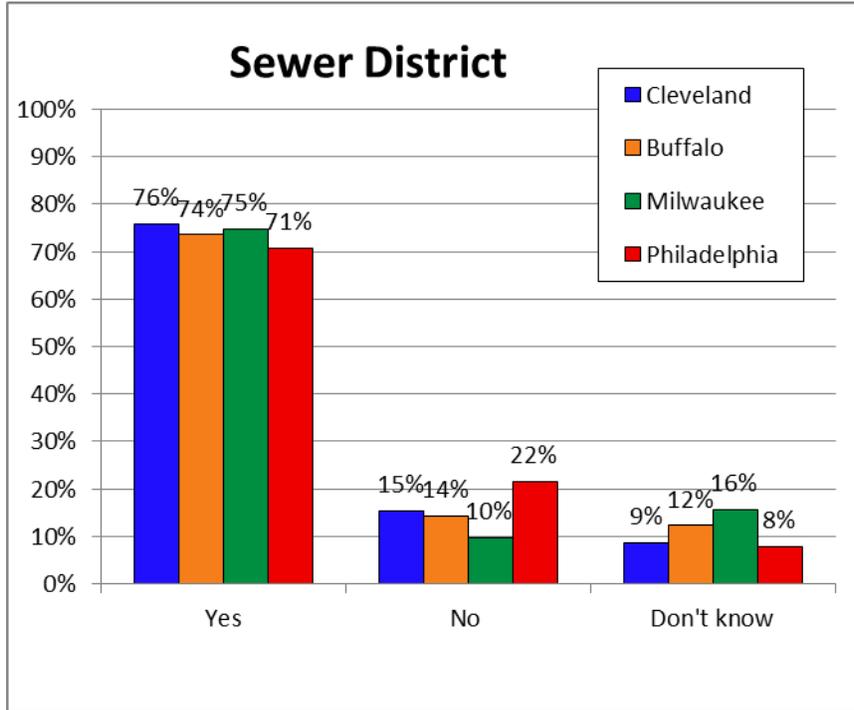
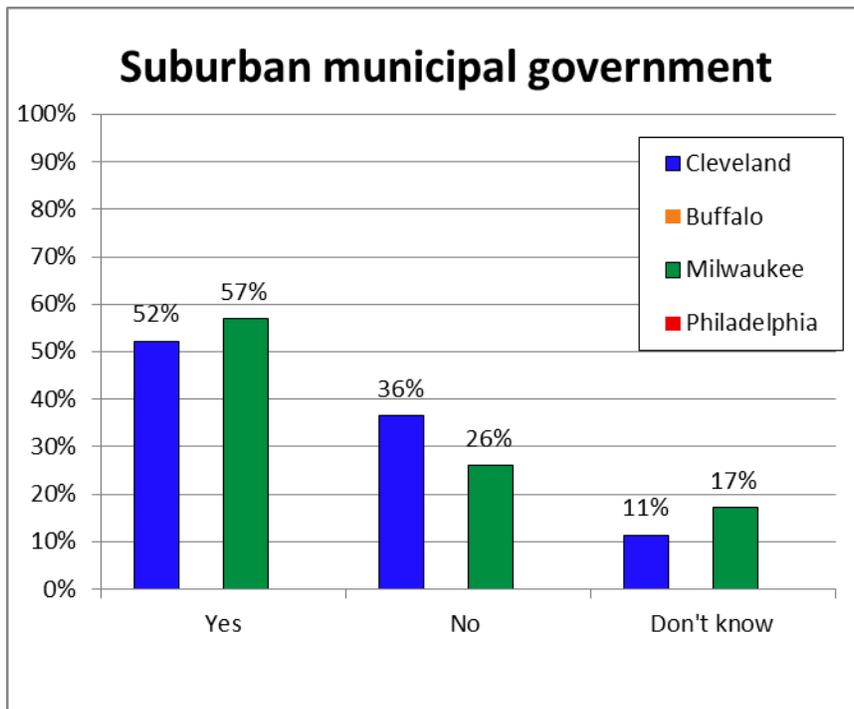
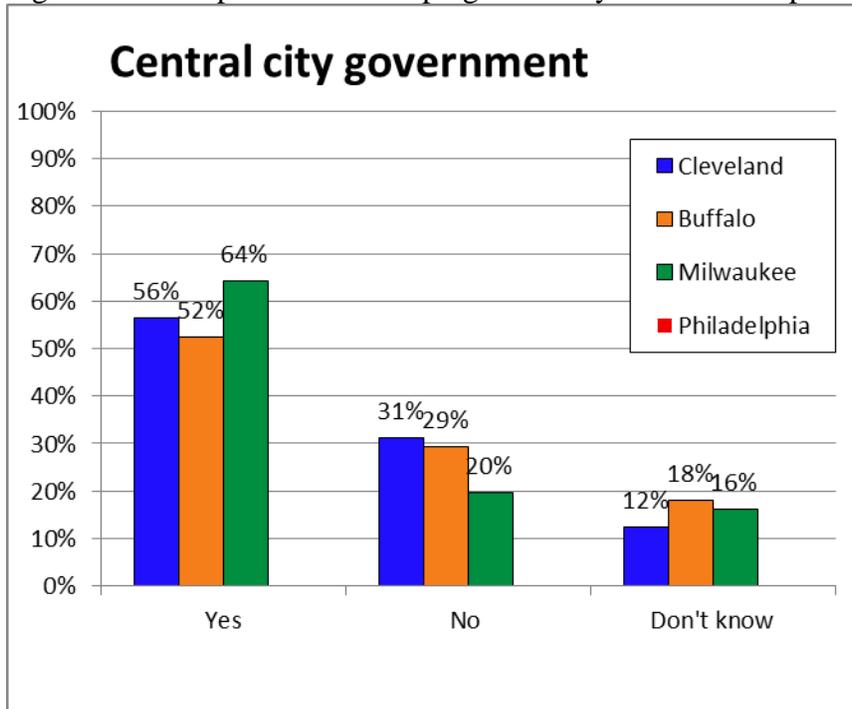


Figure 3.16: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: local city government



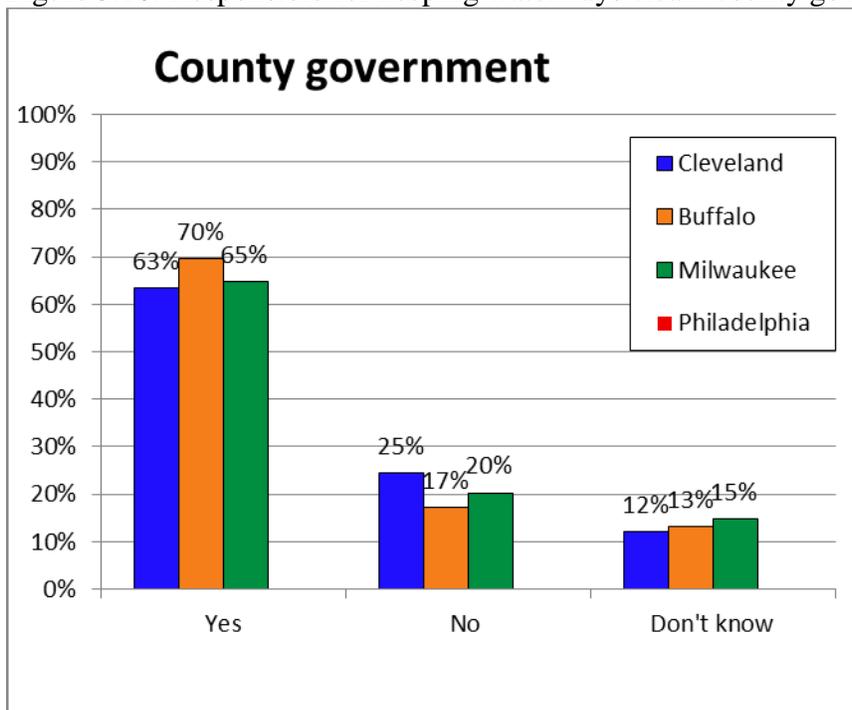
Note: Philadelphia sewer authority does not directly serve customers outside of city limits; Buffalo provides indirect service to a few small villages outside of the city boundaries; question excluded from these surveys.

Figure 3.17: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: metropolitan city government



Note: Philadelphia survey did not include this question: sewer authority only serves residents of the city of Philadelphia.

Figure 3.18: Responsible for keeping waterways clean: county government



Note: Philadelphia is not included because the county and city boundaries are the same, with the city government as the responsible entity.

### **Section 3.C: Customer identification of public agencies responsible for maintaining quality of drinking water**

Customers in each of the sewer district service areas were asked the following question: ‘Which of the following agencies are responsible for maintaining the quality of our drinking water?’ As explained at the beginning of the section, the list of agencies provided was the same as for the question concerning responsibility for cleanliness of waterways.

Figures 3.19 – 3.25 show which agencies were identified by respondents in the four regions as being responsible for keeping drinking water clean. Cleveland area respondents identified the water department most frequently (87%), followed by the NEORS and the state EPA (74% each). Local governments (central city, suburban, and county) were identified by 61% - 62% of Cleveland area respondents, while 63% identified the federal EPA.

Similar results are found in the other three regions. 86% of Buffalo residents identified the water department, followed by 72% identifying the sewer authority, mirrored by Milwaukee respondents who chose the water authority (83%) and the sewer authority (67%). 85% of Philadelphia residents identified both the water and sewer authorities, again reflecting the combined services of the Philadelphia Water Department which residents understand quite well given the survey findings. Between 56% (Milwaukee) and 67% (Buffalo) of residents in these regions identified the federal EPA as responsible, while 59% of Milwaukee respondents and 68% of Buffalo and Philadelphia respondents identified the state EPA. County, suburban, and central city governments had similar levels of identification to the Cleveland responses, ranging from 59% to 70%.

The results show the respondents in the four regions have a generally accurate understanding of which agencies are responsible for maintaining the quality of drinking water, providing the most frequent identification of water and sewer authorities, followed by federal and state EPAs, with local governments chosen the least frequently.

Figure 3.19: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: federal EPA

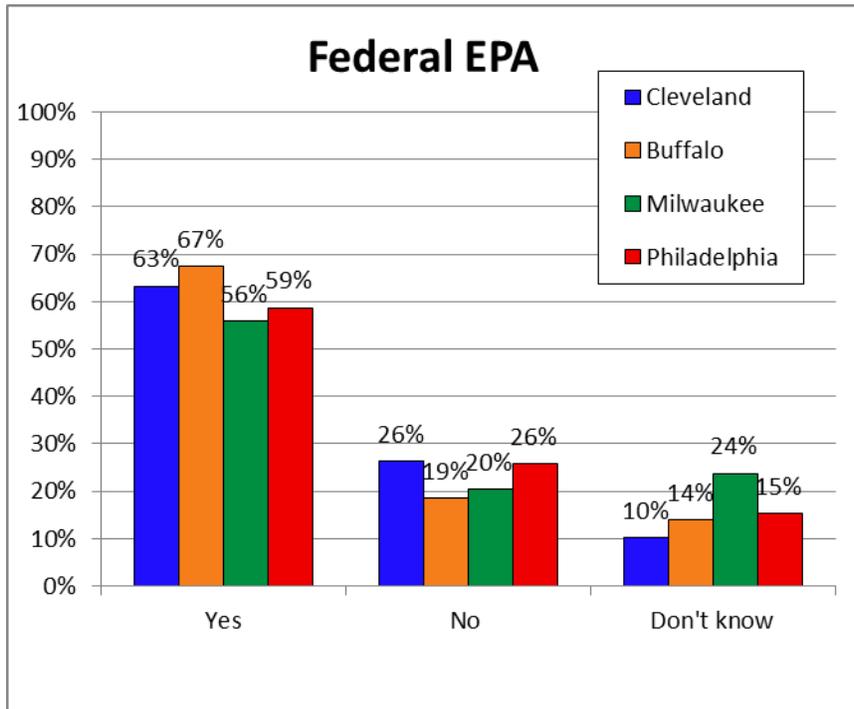


Figure 3.20: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: state EPA

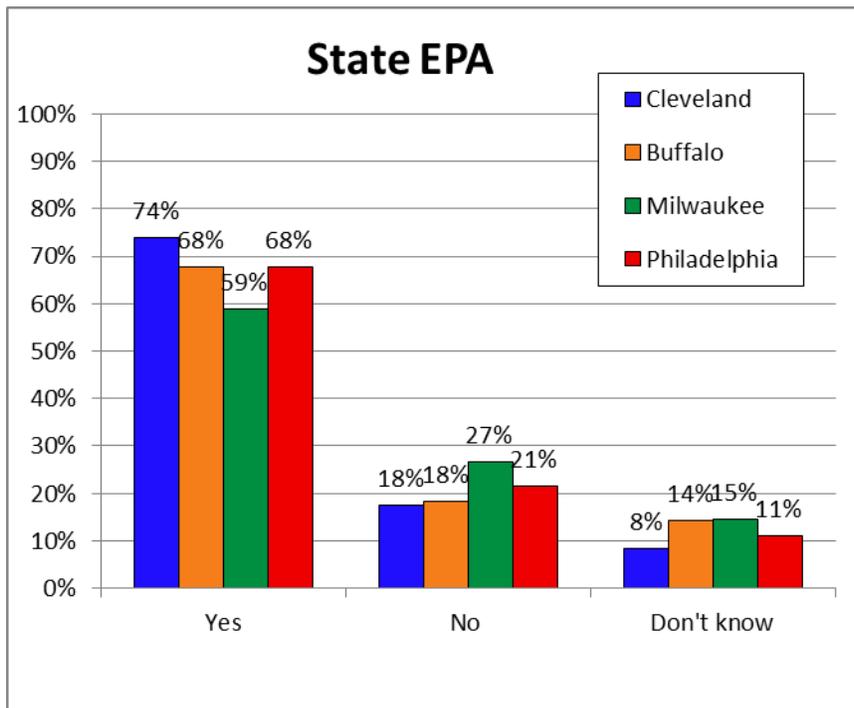


Figure 3.21: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: water department

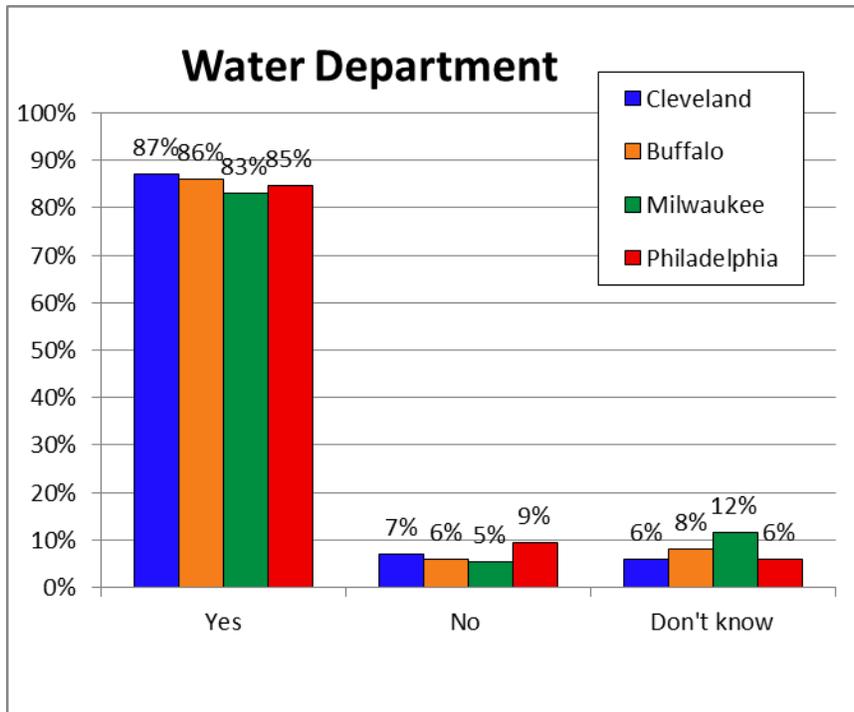


Figure 3.22: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: sewer district

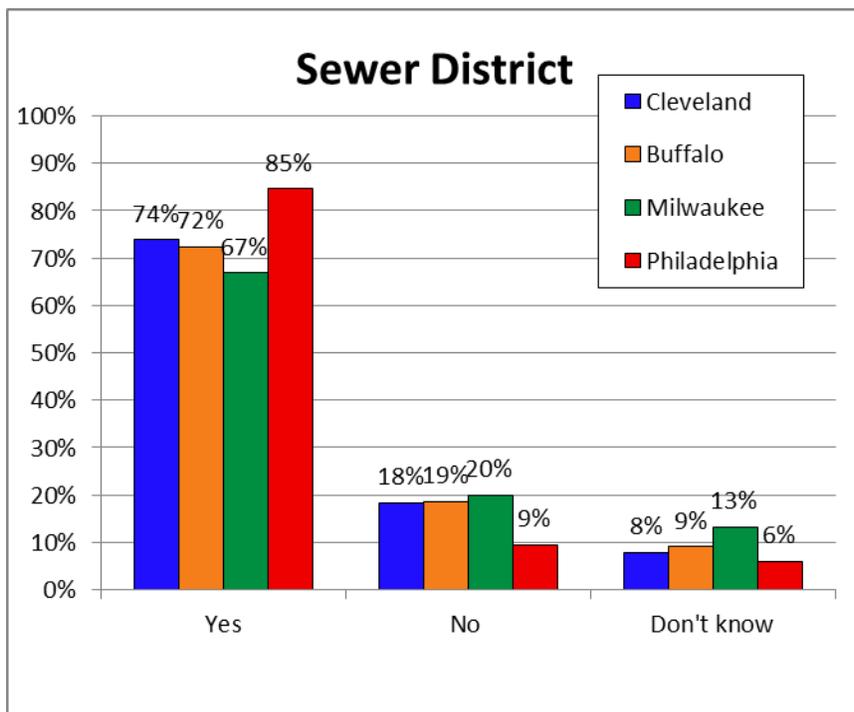
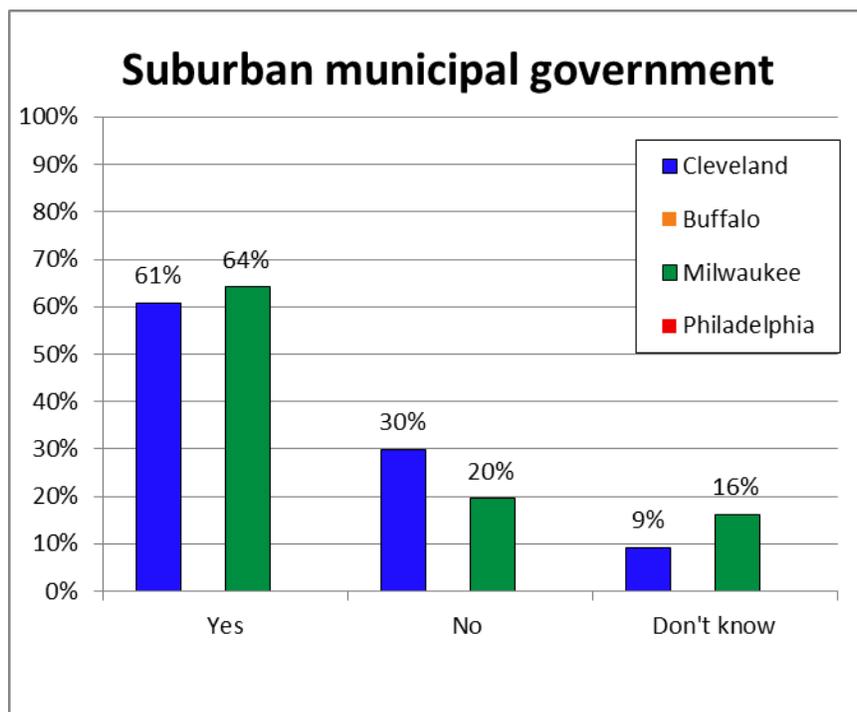
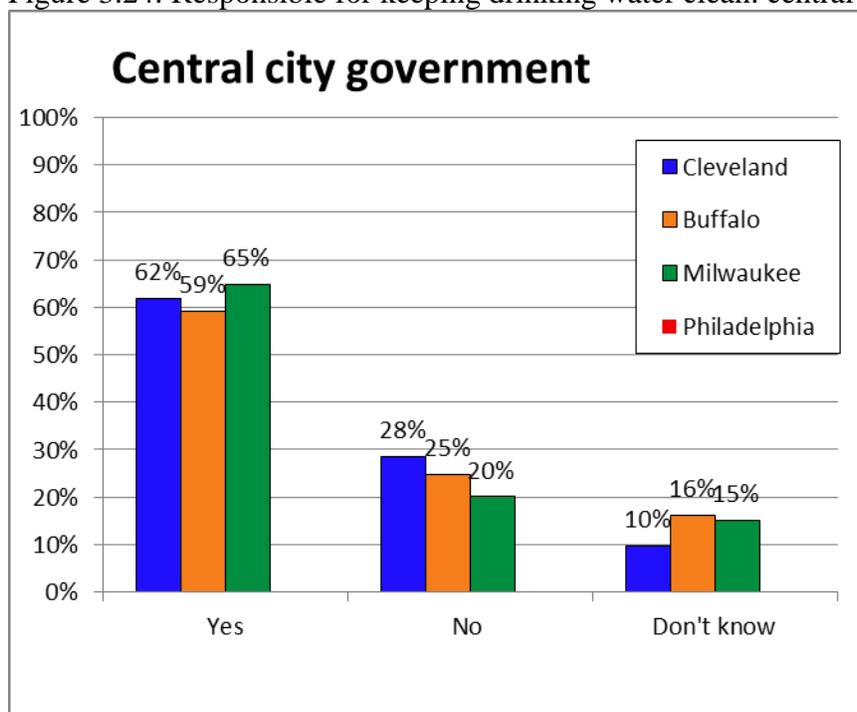


Figure 3.23: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: suburban municipal government



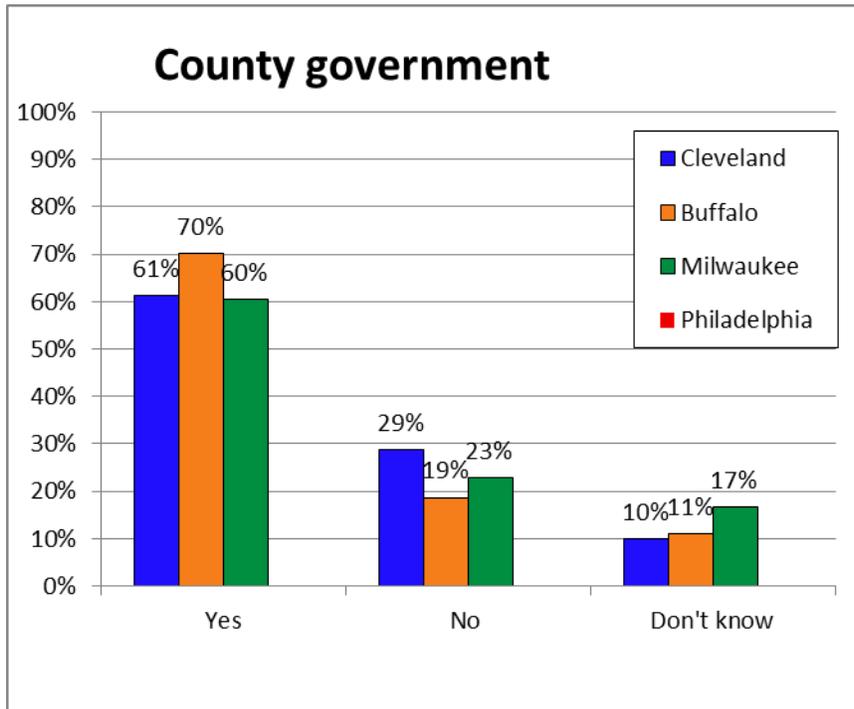
Note: Philadelphia sewer authority does not directly serve customers outside of city limits; Buffalo provides indirect service to a few small villages outside of the city boundaries; question excluded from these surveys.

Figure 3.24: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: central city government



Note: Philadelphia survey did not include this question: sewer authority only serves residents of the city of Philadelphia.

Figure 3.25: Responsible for keeping drinking water clean: county government



Note: Philadelphia is not included because the county and city boundaries are the same, with the city government as the responsible entity.

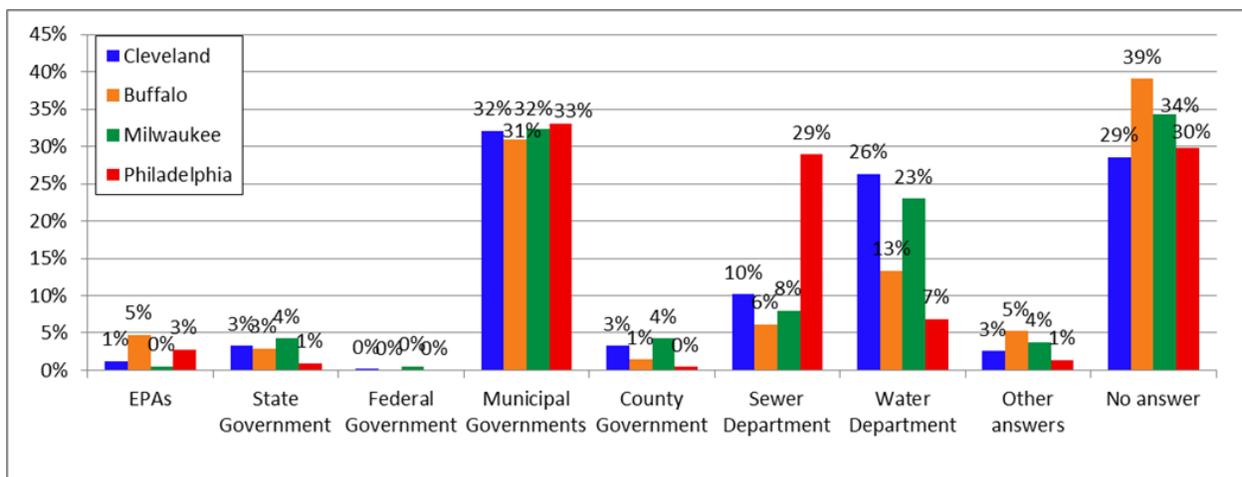
### Section 3.D: Customer identification of public agencies responsible for preventing basement and street flooding

Customers in each of the four sewer districts were asked the following question: ‘Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to prevent flooding of basements and streets?’ As with the first set of data discussed in Section 3.B, respondents were first asked to name agencies without assistance. They were then given the names of individual agencies, and asked the question again, followed by ‘Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.’

#### Section 3.D.1: Unaided responses

Figure 3.26 shows the results of the unaided recall concerning which agencies are responsible for preventing flooding. The ‘no answer’ responses were lower than in the earlier set of data concerning cleanliness of waterways (Figures 3.09 – 3.11). Buffalo led with 39%, followed by Milwaukee (34%), Philadelphia (30%), and Cleveland (29%). There was more accuracy in identifying municipal governments as responsible for prevention of basement and street flooding, with 33% of Philadelphia, 32% of Milwaukee and Cleveland, and 31% of Buffalo offering this response. 29% of Philadelphia respondents named the sewer authority as being responsible, followed by much lower percentages for Cleveland (10%), Milwaukee (8%), and Buffalo (5%).

Figure 3.26: Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for preventing neighborhood flooding?



### Section 3.D.2: Aided agency responses

Figures 3.27 – 3.33 show the frequency of identification by respondents for each public agency when individual agency names are listed in the question. Cleveland area respondents identified the NEORSD most frequently (79%), followed by their suburban municipal government (75%), a fairly accurate understanding of which agencies are responsible for addressing street and basement flooding. Fairly similar results were found in the other three regions. Buffalo respondents identified the sewer authority most frequently (80%) followed by county government (62%) and central city government (59%). Milwaukee respondents identified the sewer authority most frequently (78%), followed by suburban municipal government (67%) and central city government (63%). Philadelphia respondents identified the water and sewer department (80%), followed closely by central city government (79%).

As with earlier questions concerning agency responsibility for the services related to maintaining clean waterways (section 3.B) and clean drinking water (section 3.C), respondents have a largely accurate understanding of which agencies have responsibility for prevention of basement and street flooding. All four regions identified sewer authorities and local municipal governments most frequently as the responsible entities. Lower frequencies of identification occurred for federal and state EPAs, which ranged from 20% to 45%.

Figure 3.27: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: federal EPA

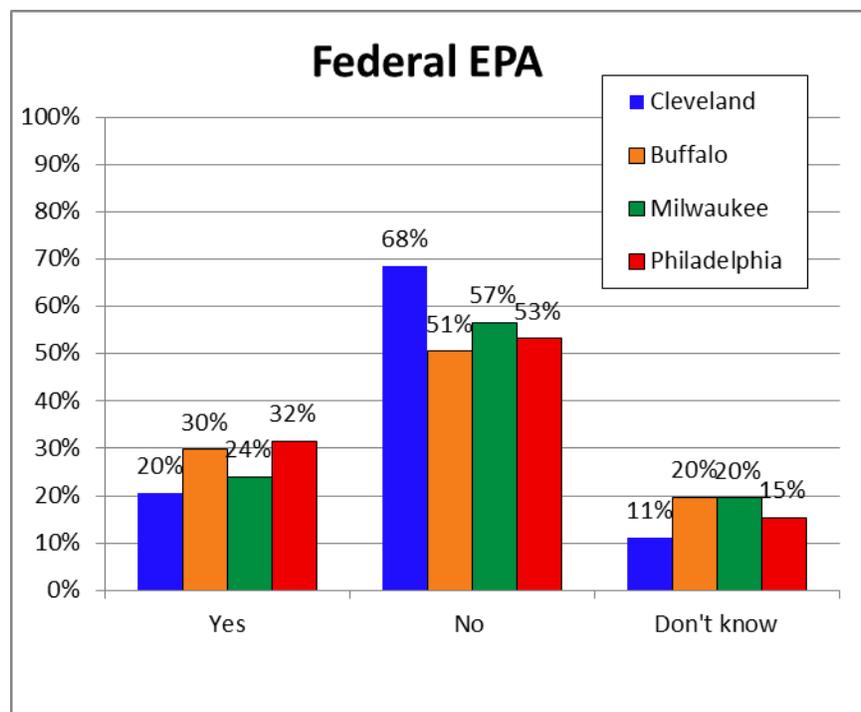


Figure 3.28: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: state EPA

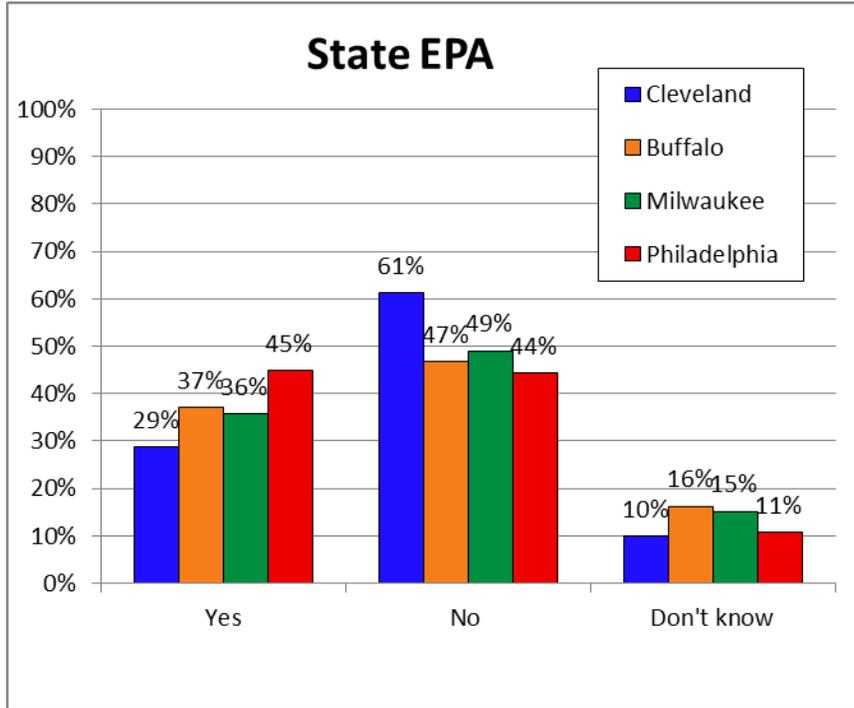


Figure 3.29: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: water department

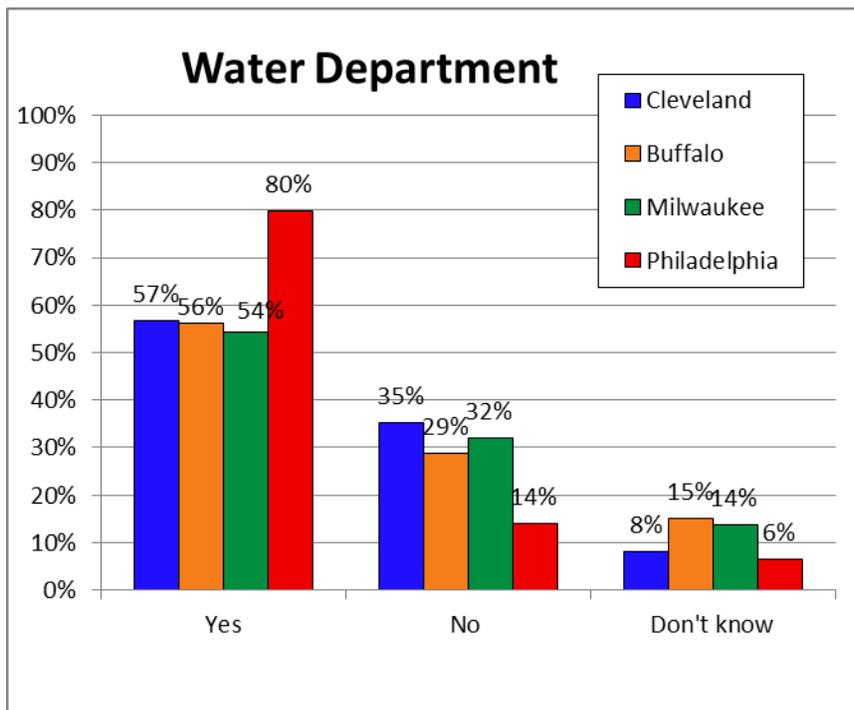


Figure 3.30: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: sewer district

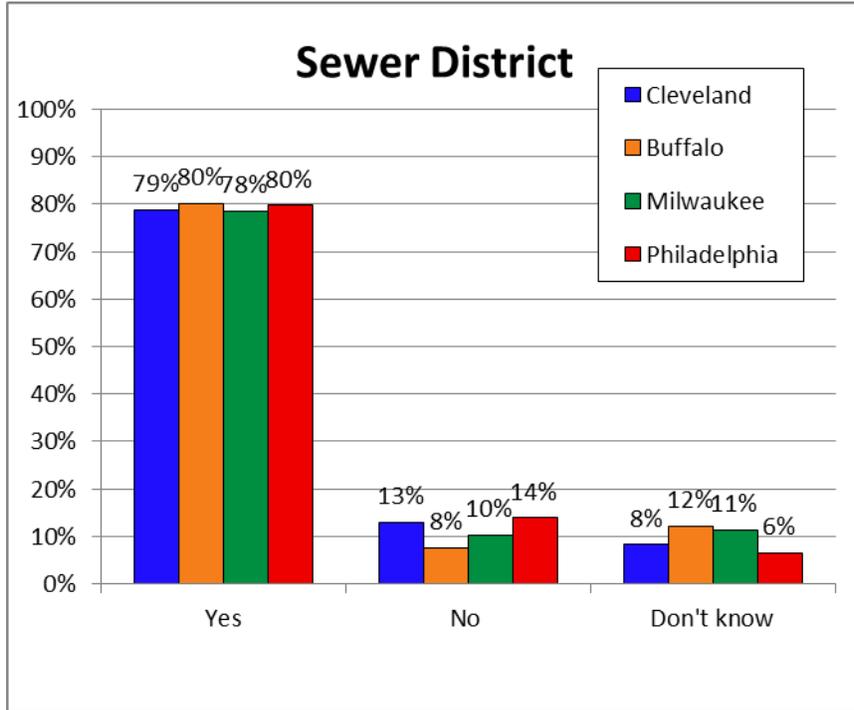
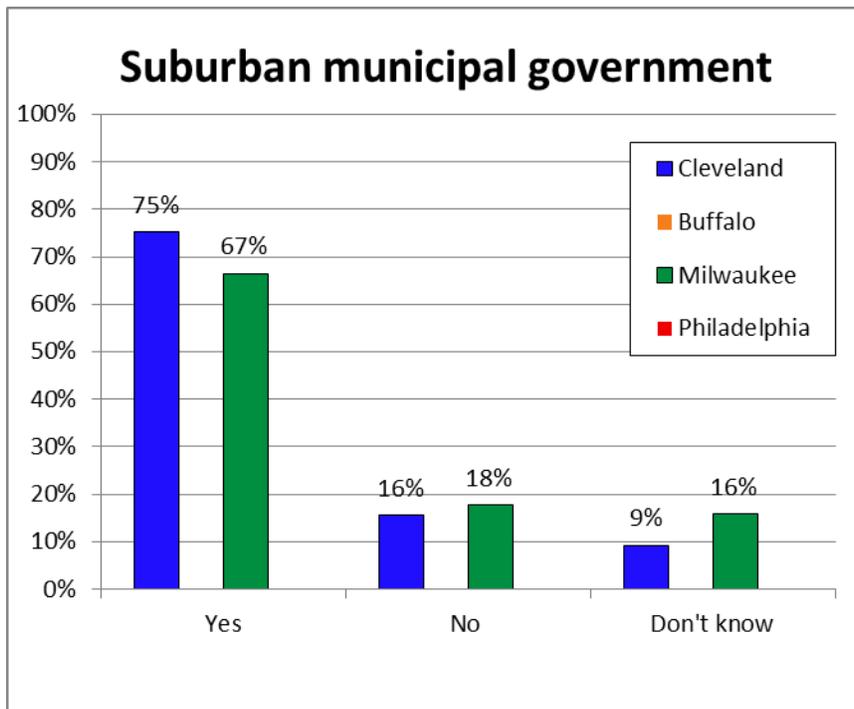


Figure 3.31: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: suburban government



Note: Philadelphia sewer authority does not directly serve customers outside of city limits; Buffalo provides indirect service to a few small villages outside of the city boundaries; question excluded from these surveys.

Figure 3.32: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: central city government

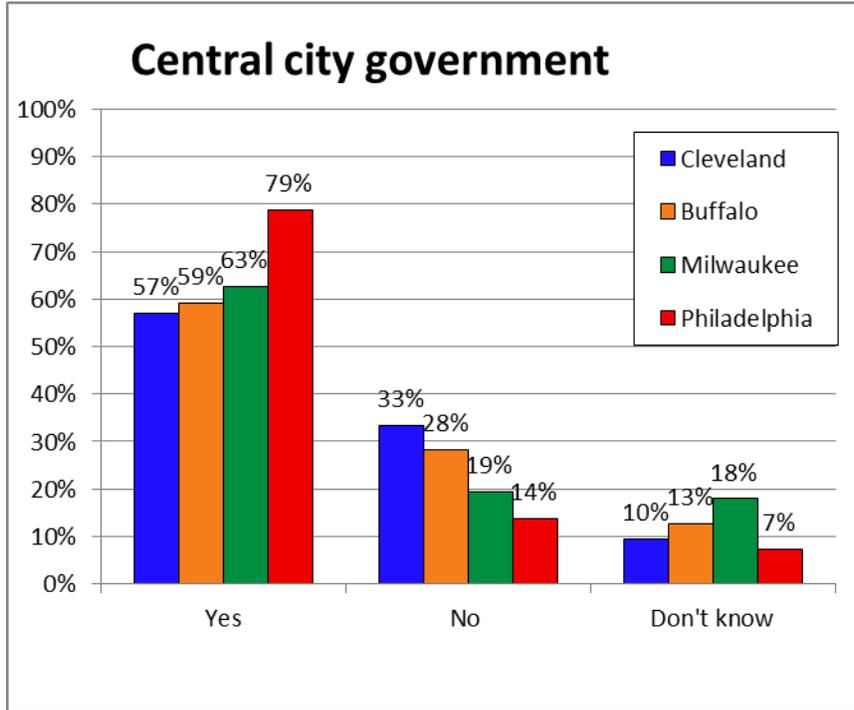
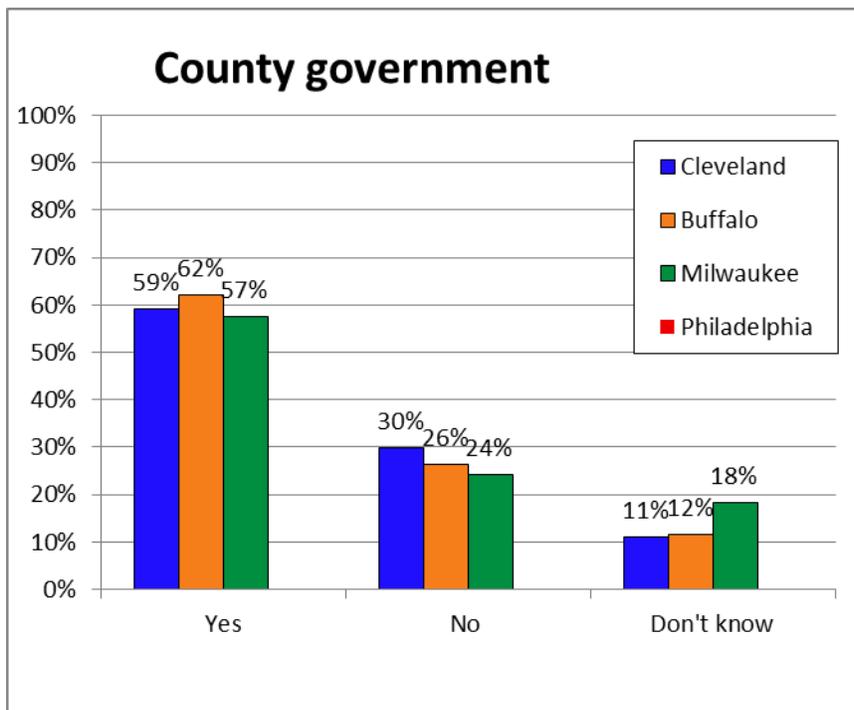


Figure 3.33: Responsible for preventing basement and street flooding: county government



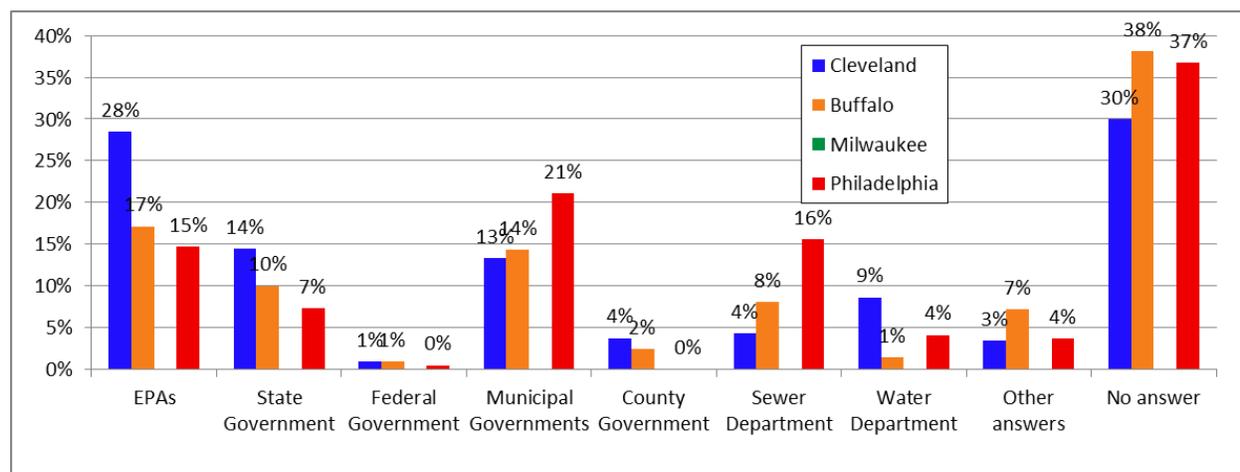
Note: Philadelphia is not included because the county and city boundaries are the same, with the city government as the responsible entity.

### Section 3.E: Customer identification of public agencies responsible for cleaning wastewater

#### Section 3.E.1: Unaided recall of agencies responsible for keeping streams clean

A similar percentage of respondents had no answer when not given prompts for agencies responsible for keeping streams clean, as shown in Figure 3.34. 38% of Buffalo, 37% of Philadelphia, and 30% of Cleveland respondents had no answer (the Milwaukee survey did not include this question). Cleveland's most frequent response was federal and state EPAs, named by 28% of respondents, followed by 17% of Buffalo and 15% of Philadelphia. The sewer authority was named by 16% of Philadelphia, 8% of Buffalo, and only 4% of Cleveland respondents. 21% of Philadelphia respondents named their municipal government, as did 14% of Buffalo and 13% of Cleveland respondents.

Figure 3.34: Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for keeping local streams free from pollution?



#### Section 3.E.2: Aided agency recall of agencies responsible for treating wastewater

Customers in the four sewer districts were asked the following question: ‘Which of the following agencies are responsible for cleaning water AFTER we use it (wastewater)?’ Figures 3.35 – 3.41 show the frequency of selection for each of the agencies by respondents in the four survey regions.

As with prior agency identification, respondents across the four regions have a largely accurate understanding of which agencies have primary responsibility for treatment of wastewater. All four sets of respondents chose their sewer authority most frequently, ranging from 77% of Milwaukee respondents to 82% of respondents in Buffalo and Philadelphia, and 83% of respondents in the Cleveland area. Water departments followed closely, identified by 82% of respondents in Philadelphia, 81% in Buffalo, 74% in Cleveland, and 71% in the Milwaukee area.

Results for the remaining agencies were mixed. Suburban and central city governments were identified by a range of 54% - 58% of respondents. County governments were identified by 53% of respondents in Cleveland, 65% in Buffalo, and 50% in Milwaukee. The federal EPA was identified by a range of 39% of Cleveland respondents to 56% of Buffalo respondents. The range for identification of state EPAs was 45% (Milwaukee) to 59% (Buffalo). Even though the vast majority of respondents correctly identified local sewer and water authorities as responsible for treating wastewater, there were still about half of respondents that inaccurately identified local governments and federal and state EPAs as responsible.

Figure 3.35: Responsible for treating wastewater: federal EPA

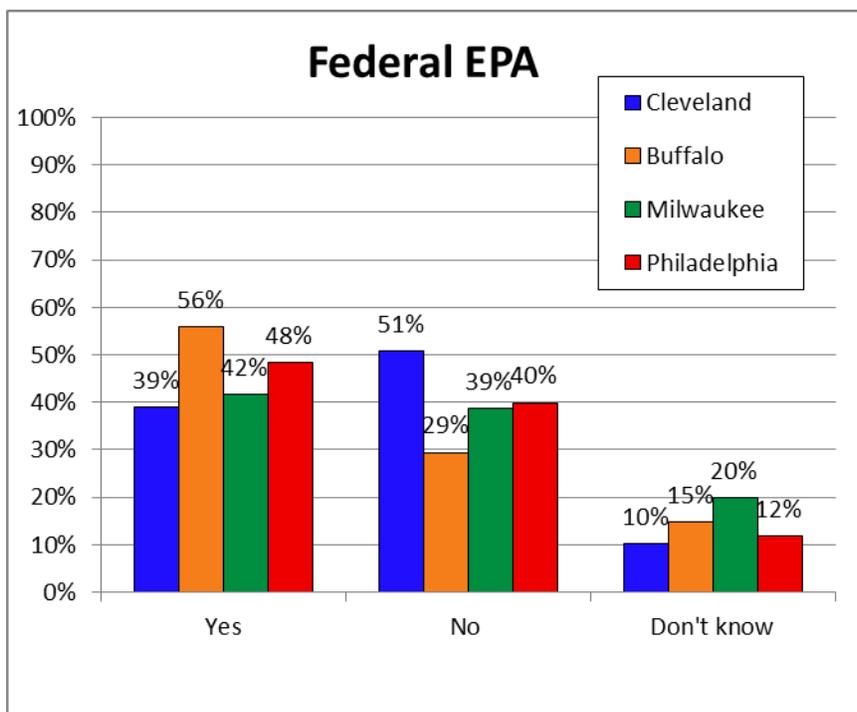


Figure 3.36: Responsible for treating wastewater: state EPA

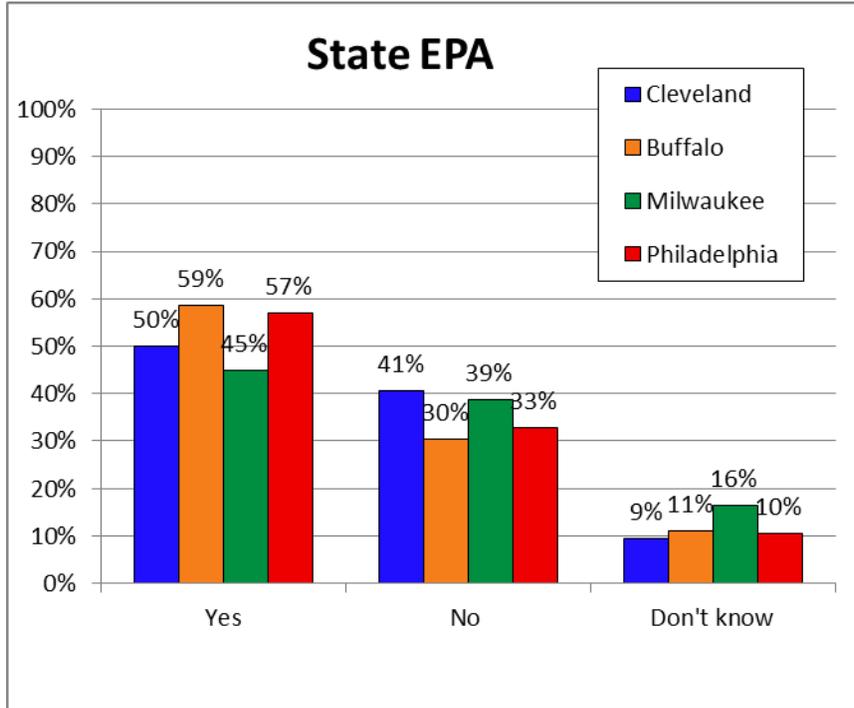


Figure 3.37: Responsible for treating wastewater: water department

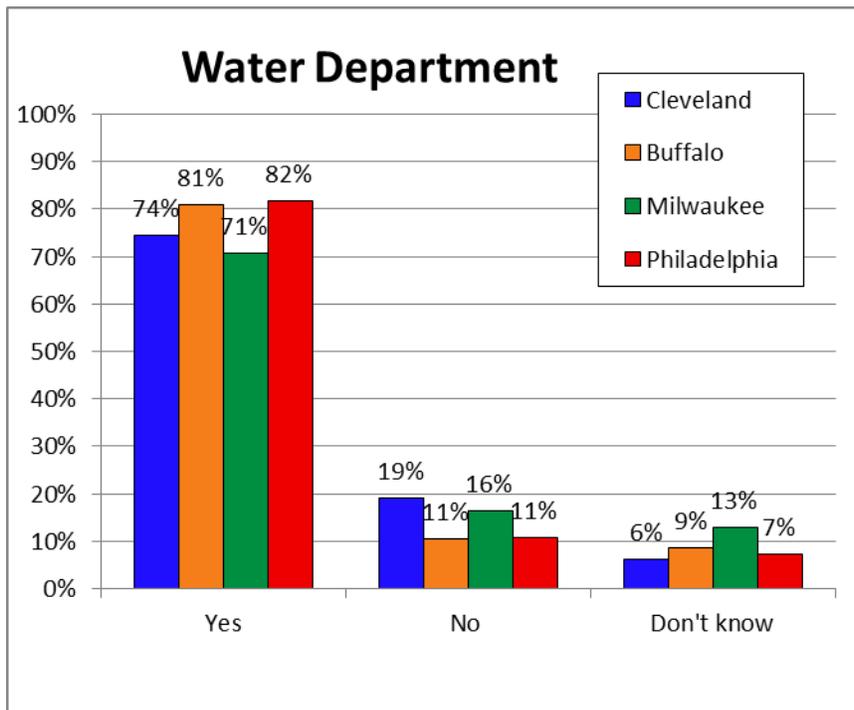


Figure 3.38: Responsible for treating wastewater: sewer district

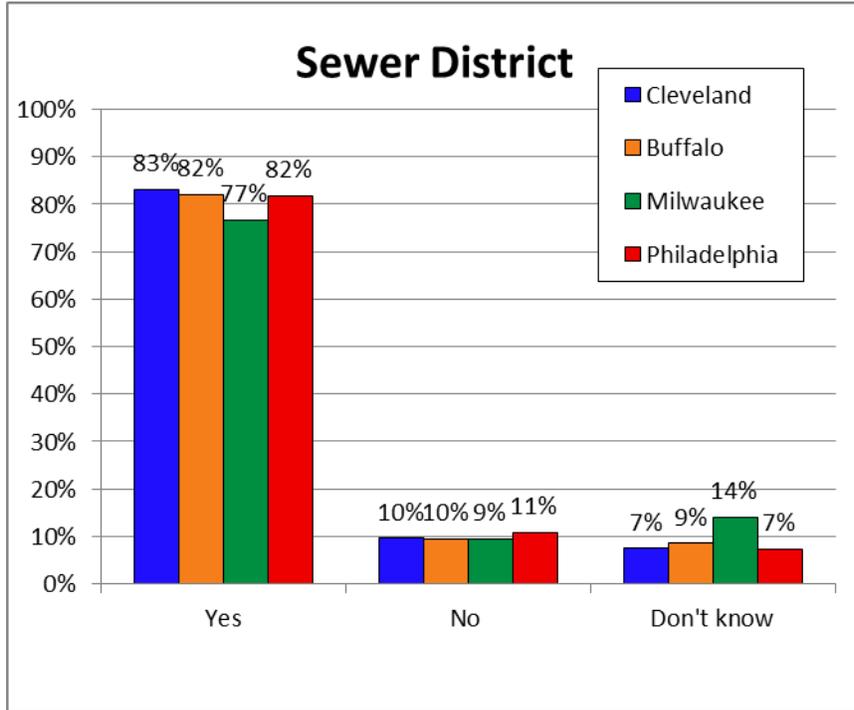
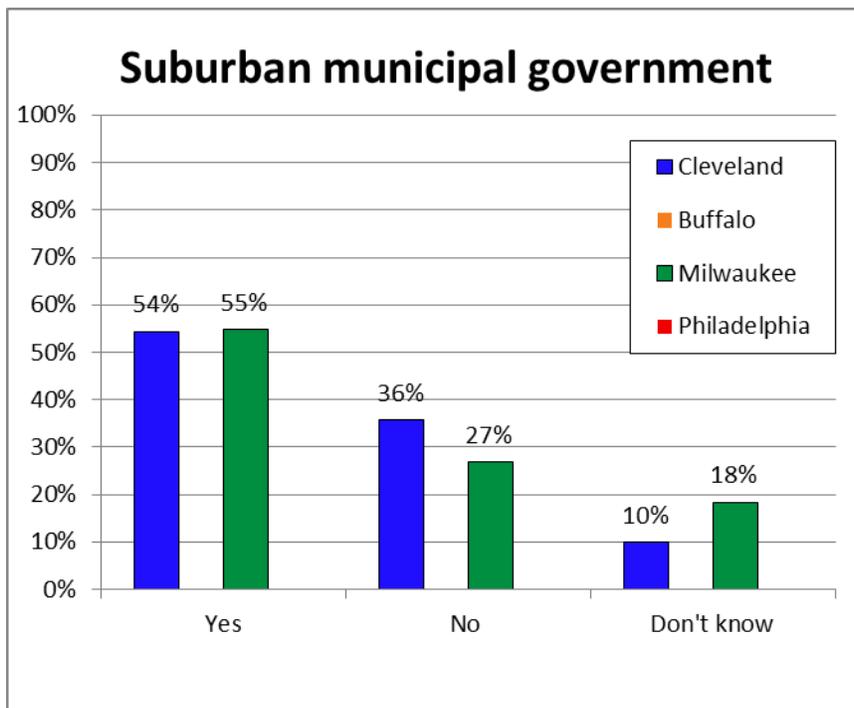
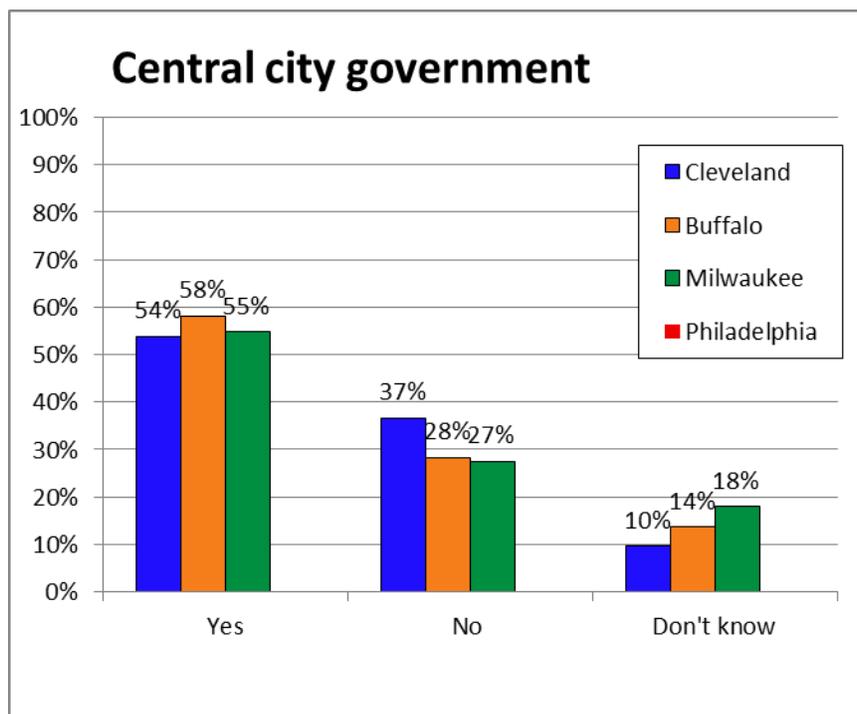


Figure 3.39: Responsible for treating wastewater: suburban city government



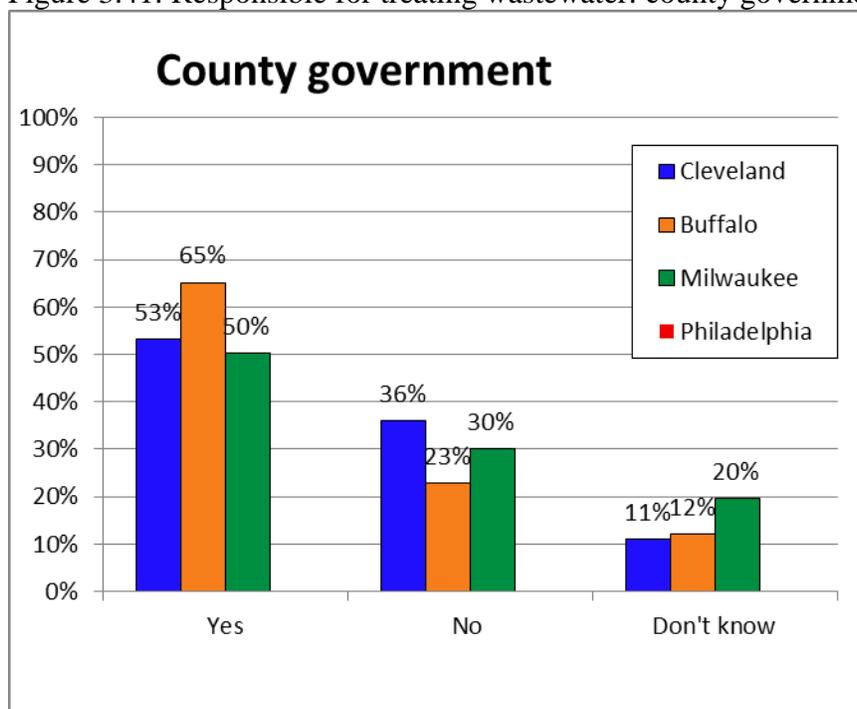
Note: Philadelphia sewer authority does not directly serve customers outside of city limits; Buffalo provides indirect service to a few small villages outside of the city boundaries; question excluded from these surveys.

Figure 3.40: Responsible for treating wastewater: central city government



Note: Philadelphia survey did not include this question: sewer authority only serves residents of the city of Philadelphia.

Figure 3.41: Responsible for treating wastewater: county government



Note: Philadelphia is not included because the county and city boundaries are the same, with the city government as the responsible entity.

### **Section 3.F: Customer awareness of storm and sewer water treatment**

Customers were asked the following question: ‘Do you know whether STORMWATER is treated before it goes into the lake/river?’

According to Figure 3.42, there is a wide range of perceptions about the treatment of stormwater, with significant percentages of respondents not knowing the degree of treatment. The range of respondents answering ‘Don’t know’ to this question was quite large. Cleveland had the lowest level of lack of knowledge at 27%, followed by Milwaukee at 34%, Buffalo at 36%, and Philadelphia at 40%.

The question is somewhat difficult, because it depends on whether a household is served by a combined sewer or separate lines for sanitary and stormwater. Separate lines typically mean that stormwater runs untreated into the waterways, while combined systems carry stormwater into the treatment system. The exceptions to this occur during wet weather events when combined systems can overflow, allowing both sanitary and stormwater to flow untreated into area waterways. Each of the sewer authorities includes a mix of combined sewers and sanitary and storm sewers.

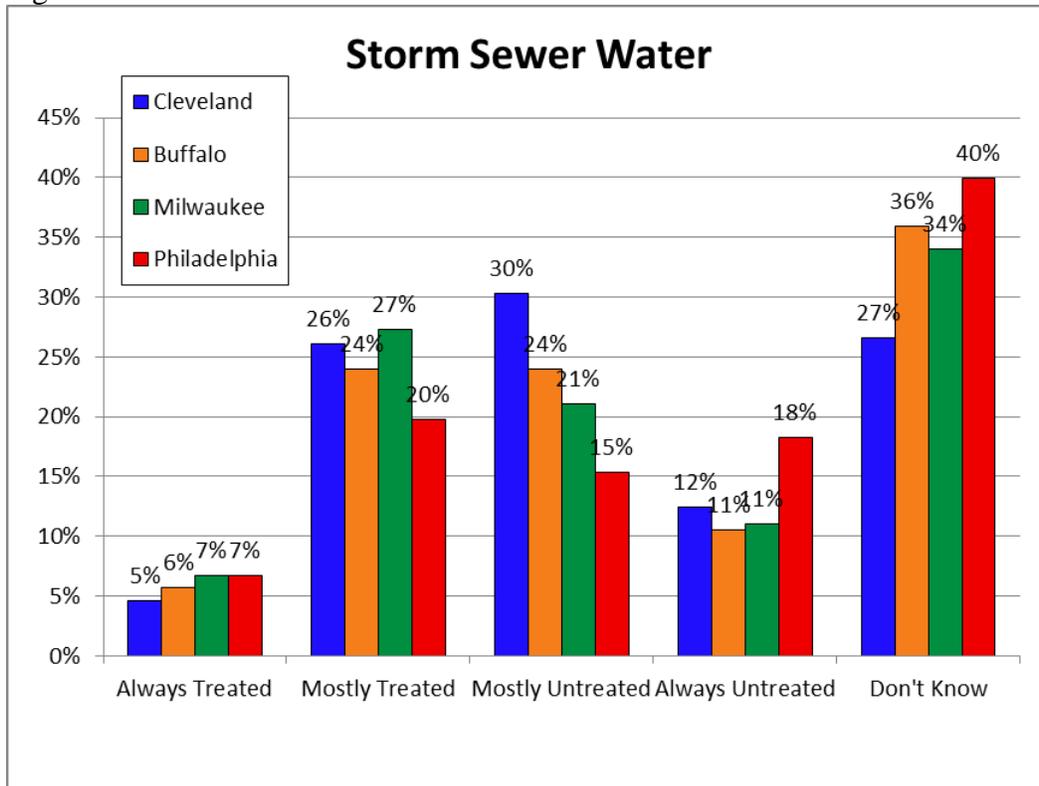
Respondents reflect this complexity in their answers. Those answering that stormwater is always or mostly untreated ranged from 32% of respondents in the Cleveland and Milwaukee areas to 33% of Philadelphia respondents and 35% of Buffalo respondents. Those who think stormwater is always or mostly treated range from 34% of Milwaukee respondents, to 31% in the Cleveland area, 30% in Buffalo, and 27% in Philadelphia.

Figure 3.43 asks about respondent awareness of the treatment of sanitary water. Customers were asked: ‘Do you know whether SANITARY WATER is treated before it goes into the lake/river?’ About one third of respondents said they did not know, ranging from 23% of Cleveland area respondents to 33% in Buffalo and 35% of those in Milwaukee and Philadelphia. An accurate response in each area would be that sanitary water is always or mostly treated (heavy storm events being the exception).

Cleveland area respondents had the highest awareness of whether sanitary water is treated, with 58% stating that it is always or mostly treated. This was followed by 48% of Milwaukee respondents, 45% of Buffalo respondents, and 42% of Philadelphia respondents. In contrast, 17% of Milwaukee respondents think sanitary water is mostly or always untreated, followed by 19% of Cleveland respondents, 22% of Buffalo and 23% of Philadelphia respondents.

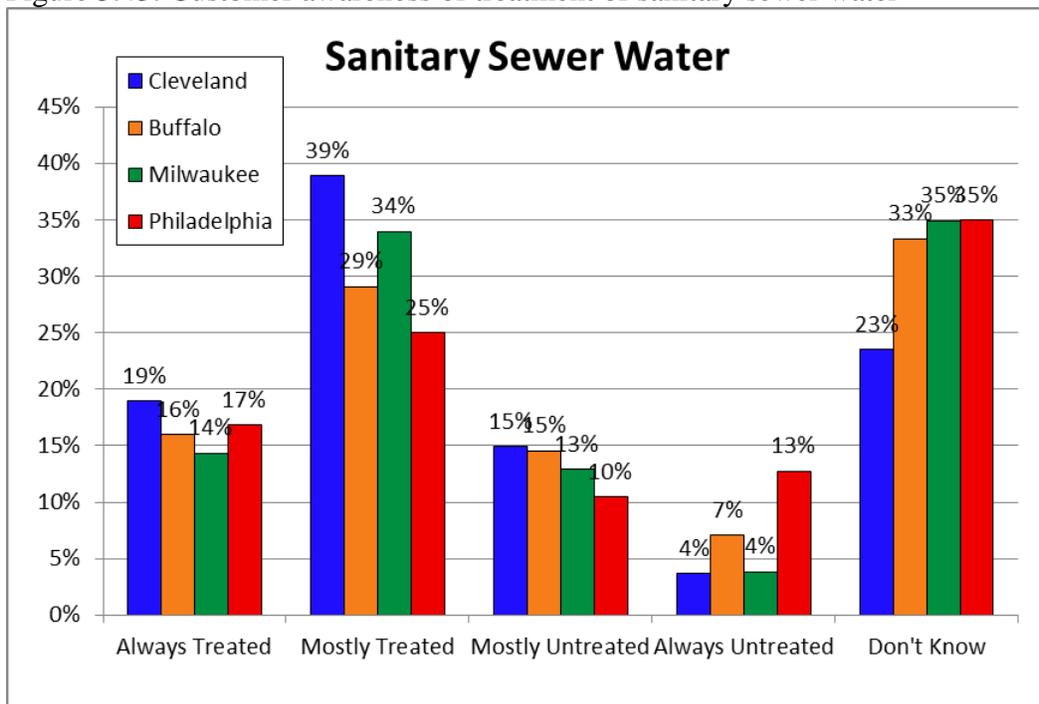
The higher levels of accuracy among respondents in the NEORS D Cleveland service area may reflect the effectiveness of community awareness campaigns in this region compared with the other three communities surveyed.

Figure 3.42: Customer awareness of storm sewer water treatment



Customers were also asked: ‘Do you know whether SANITARY WATER is treated before it goes into the lake/river?’

Figure 3.43: Customer awareness of treatment of sanitary sewer water



### **Section 3.G: Customer identification of responsive public agencies**

Customers in each of the sewer districts were asked the following question: ‘Which agency impresses you as being most responsive to customers’ needs?’ Figures 3.44 – 3.50 provide data concerning the frequency of identification for each of the agencies as being responsive to customer needs.

Cleveland area respondents identified local suburban government most often as the most responsive agency (53%), followed by the water department (51%) and the sewer authority (48%). This set was followed by county government (36%), central city government (Cleveland) at 35%, the state EPA at 32% and the federal EPA at 25%.

Buffalo respondents identified their water authority as responsive most frequently (53%), followed by the sewer authority (50%). County government was identified by 44% of respondents, followed by central city (Buffalo) government (40%), the state EPA (39%) and the federal EPA (31%).

Milwaukee, being similar to Cleveland in having a regional sewer authority serving many communities, also had similar survey results. The Milwaukee water department was identified most frequently (51%), followed by suburban government (46%). The Milwaukee sewer authority tied with central city (Milwaukee) government at 43%, followed by the state EPA at 42%, county government at 39%, and the federal EPA at 28%.

Philadelphians identified their water/sewer department as responsive first, at 60%, followed by central city (Philadelphia) government at 46%. The state EPA came in at 40%, followed by the federal EPA at 33% (Philadelphia Water serves only the city of Philadelphia, which has the same boundaries as the county; therefore, the suburban and county government categories were excluded).

Figure 3.44: Responsive to customer needs: federal EPA

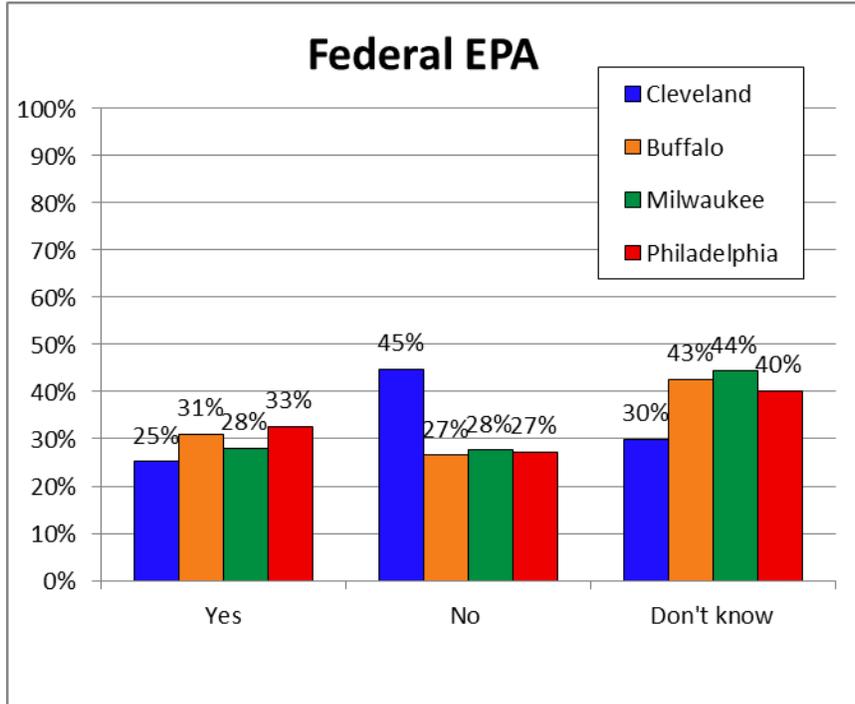


Figure 3.45: Responsive to customer needs: state EPA

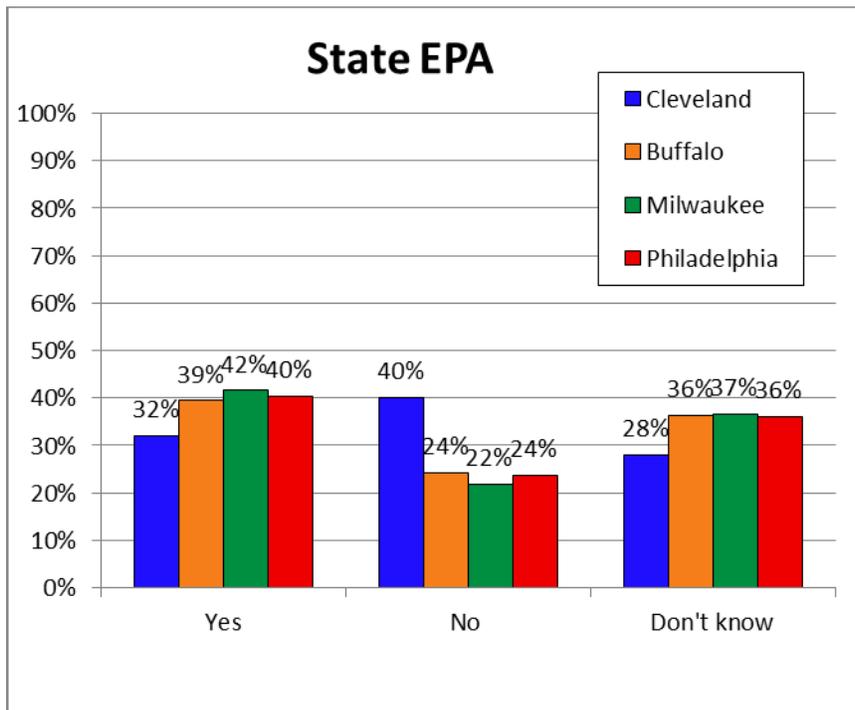


Figure 3.46: Responsive to customer needs: water department

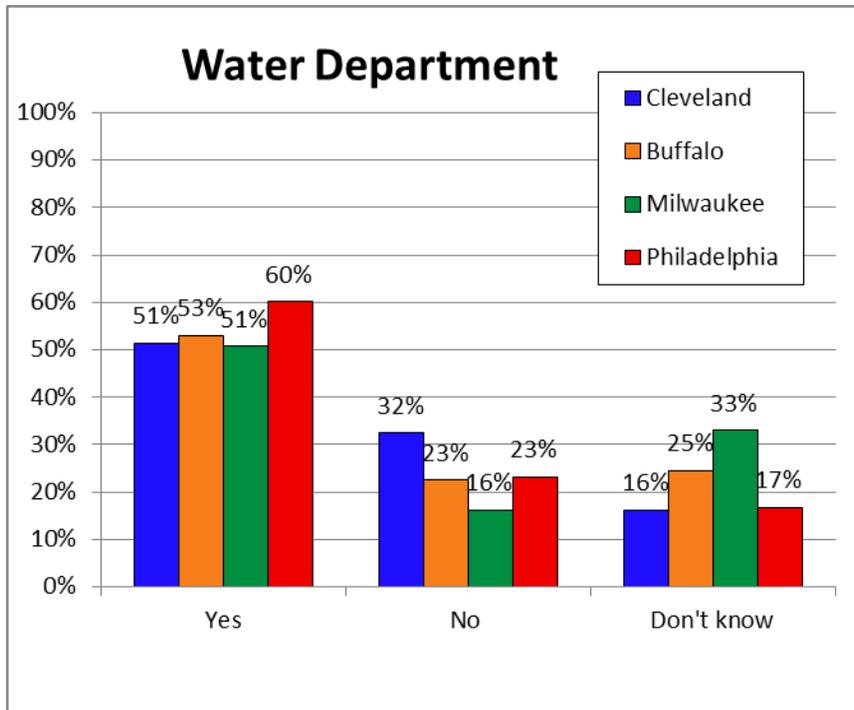


Figure 3.47: Responsive to customer needs: sewer district

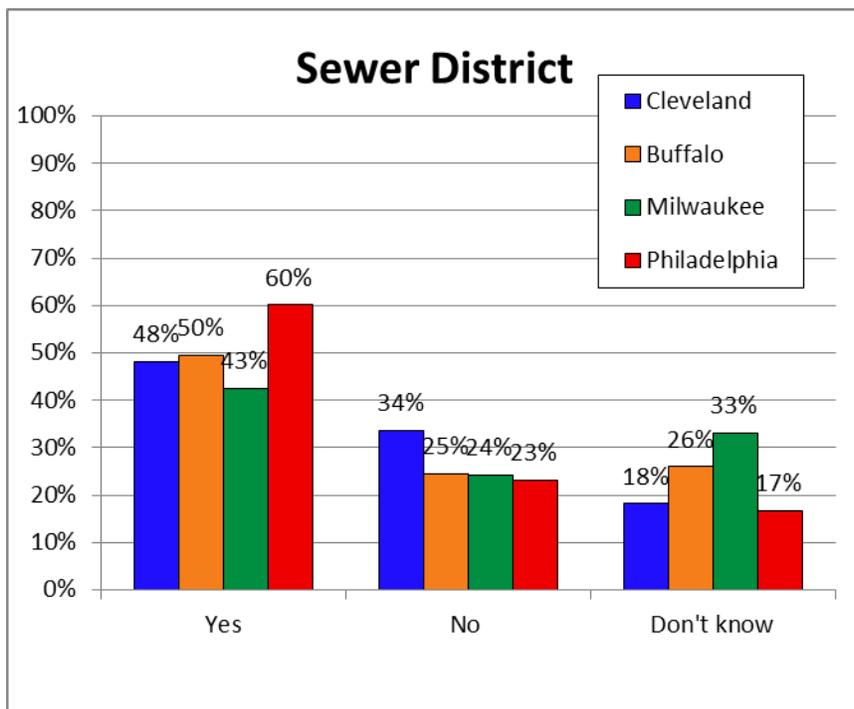
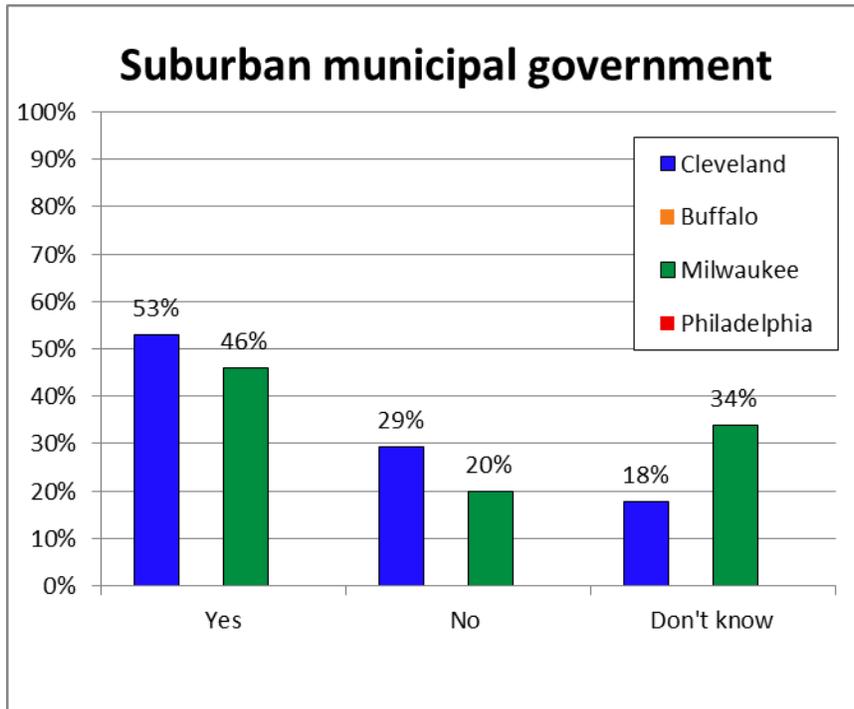


Figure 3.48: Responsive to customer needs: suburban city government



Note: Philadelphia sewer authority does not directly serve customers outside of city limits; Buffalo provides indirect service to a few small villages outside of the city boundaries; question excluded from these surveys.

Figure 3.49: Responsive to customer needs: central city government

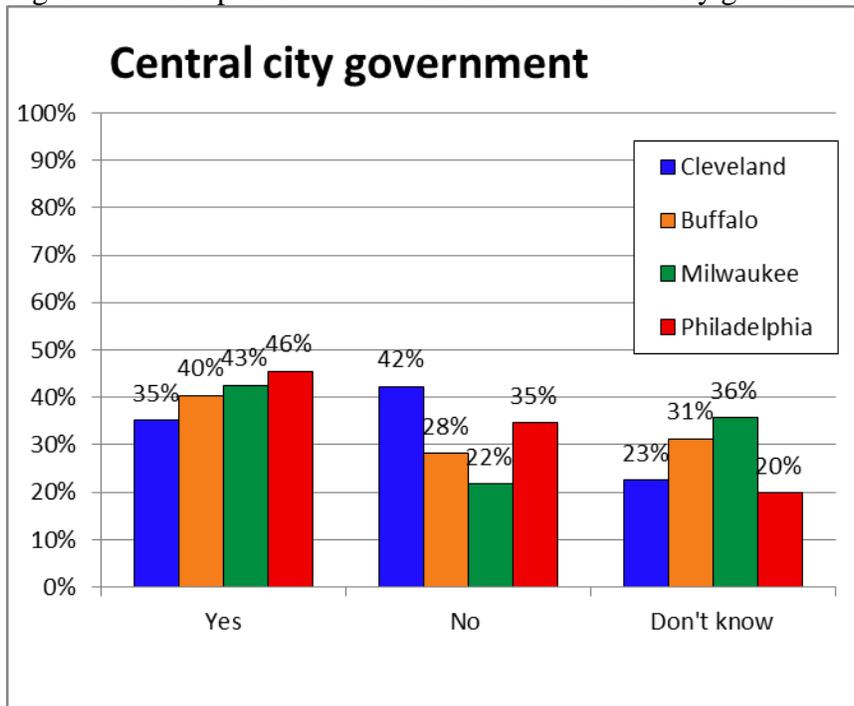
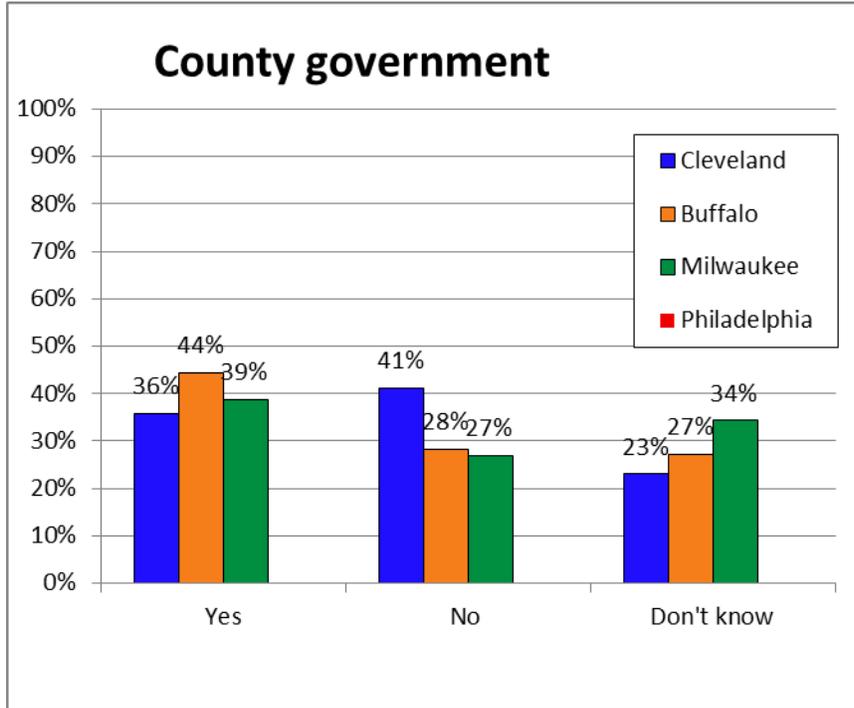


Figure 3.50: Responsive to customer needs: county government



Note: Philadelphia is not included because the county and city boundaries are the same, with the city government as the responsible entity.

### Section 3.H: Customer evaluation of water and sewer authorities

Figure 3.51 shows the unaided recall of which agency is responsible for distributing water and sewer bills. About 20% of respondents across the four cities gave no answer. Sewer authorities got the highest responses, with 56% of Philadelphia, 37% of Buffalo, 35% of Cleveland, and 27% of Milwaukee naming the sewer authority as the source of billing for water and sewer fees. This is accurate for Milwaukee and Philadelphia, but not for Cleveland and Buffalo. 31% of Cleveland named the water department (accurate), followed by 11% of Milwaukee, 6% of Buffalo, and 3% of Philadelphia (accurate). Municipal government, which is sometimes conflated with water departments, was named as the billing agent by 45% of Milwaukee, 35% of Buffalo, 26% of Cleveland, and 19% of Philadelphia respondents.

Figures 3.52 and 3.53 indicate the evaluation of the water and sewer authorities of each of the four survey regions. The Cleveland Water Department and the NEORS D each received the highest frequency responses of customers ranking departments as ‘excellent’ or ‘good.’

Figure 3.52 provides data on the overall evaluation of each region’s water departments. The Cleveland Water Department got this combined rating from 65% of respondents. Milwaukee’s water authority was second with 64%, followed by the Buffalo Water Department at 50% and the Philadelphia Water Department at 45%. Milwaukee got the lowest percentage of ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ ratings at 4%, followed by the Cleveland Water Department at 6%, the Buffalo Water Department at 10%, and the Philadelphia Water Department at 13%.

Figure 3.53 shows the overall evaluation of each region’s sewer authority. As indicated above, the NEORS D had the highest percentage of ‘excellent’ or ‘good’ ratings at 49%. The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer Authority came in next at 46%, followed by the Philadelphia Water and Sewer Department at 38% and the Buffalo Sewer Authority at 37%. NEORS D also got the lowest ratings of ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ at only a combined 11%. The Buffalo and Milwaukee authorities tied with 13% at these levels, followed by Philadelphia at 14%.

Figure 3.54 shows the perceptions of respondents about whether they think they are ‘getting their money’s worth’ in their water bills. Cleveland area residents appear to think they are not getting as much value in comparison with residents of the other three regions. Cleveland area respondents came in last at 38% saying they mostly think they are getting their money’s worth in their water bill, compared with 40% for Philadelphia, 42% for Buffalo, and 49% for Milwaukee. An even third of Cleveland respondents think they are not getting their money’s worth from water service (33%), compared with 29% of Buffalo, 27% of Philadelphia, and 22% of Milwaukee.

Figure 3.55 shows that Cleveland area residents are also less satisfied with the value of their sewer bill. 36% said they are mostly satisfied, compared with 39% of Buffalo residents and 47% of Milwaukee residents. Philadelphia came in lower than Cleveland at 26%. These results complement the low ratings for sewer service value for these communities. Cleveland respondents were the most dissatisfied, with 39% saying they mostly do not get their money’s worth from their sewer bill, compared with 34% of Philadelphia, 30% of Buffalo, and 29% of Milwaukee respondents.

The results are mixed for the NEORS. Customers are generally satisfied with their service, especially as compared with the responses of customers in the other three sewer districts. However, they are less likely to think that they are getting their money's worth from the billing for water and sewer service. This may in part be due to the diffusion of the billing process, which is handled primarily by the Cleveland Water Department, but in some communities is actually billed by the local municipality. Quarterly billing combined with recent rate increases may also be contributing to the perception of lower value for the same service.

Figure 3.51: Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for issuing your water and sewer bill? (unaided recall)

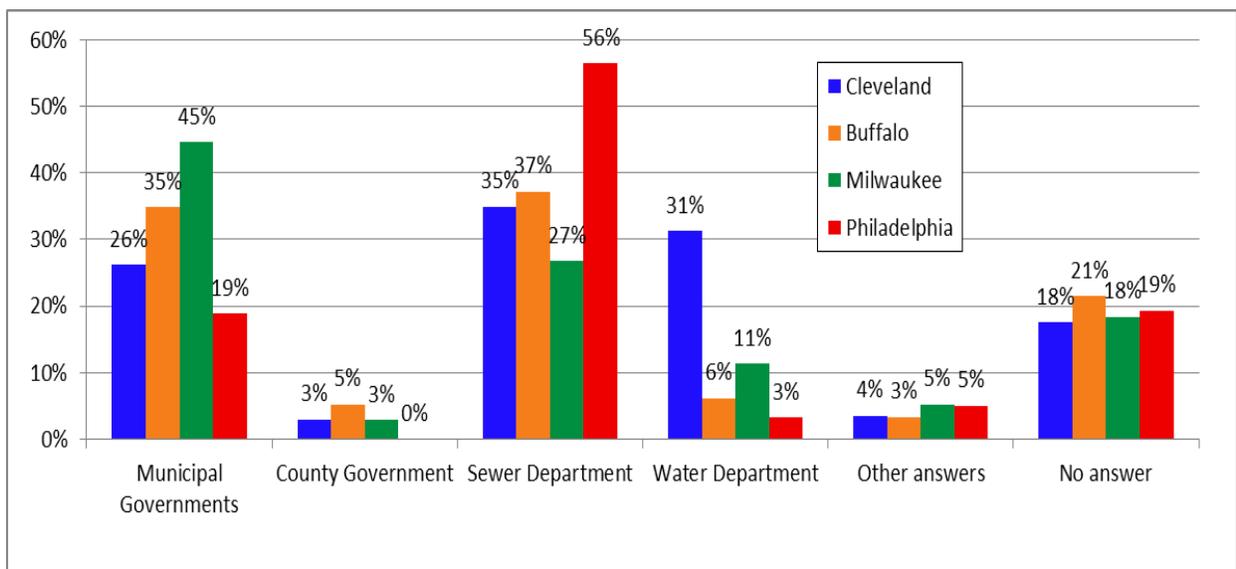


Figure 3.52: Overall evaluation of water department

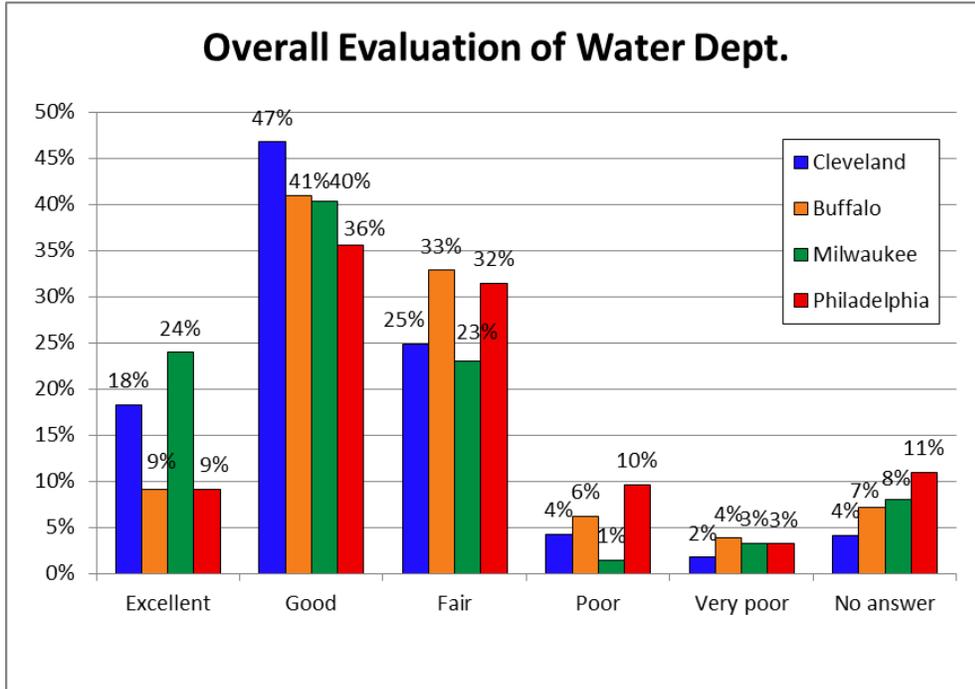


Figure 3.53: Overall evaluation of sewer department

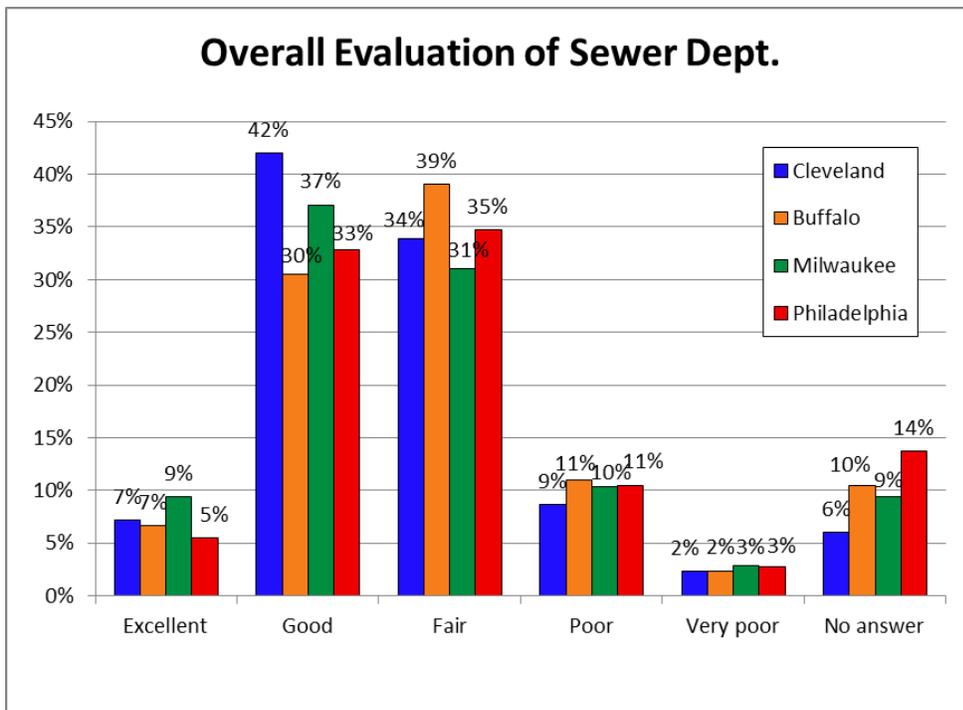


Figure 3.54: Does customer get money's worth on water bill?

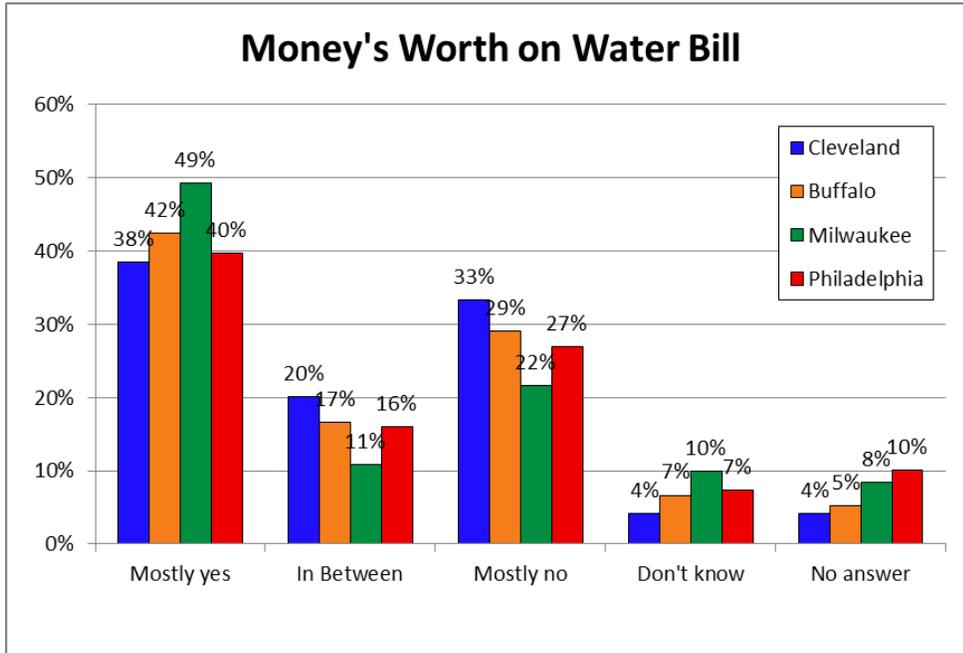
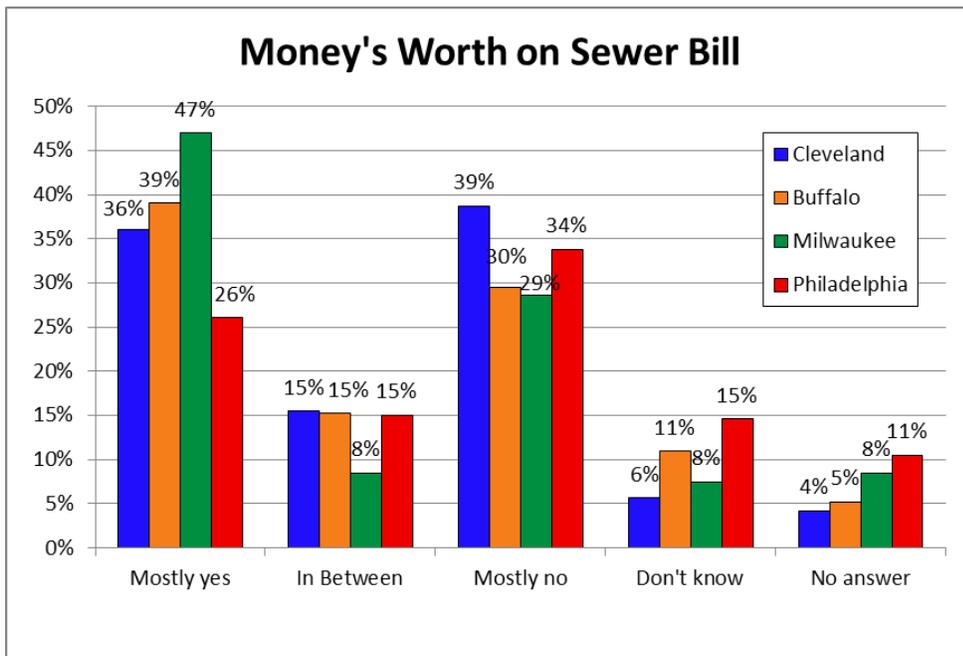


Figure 3.55: Does customer get money's worth on sewer bill?



### **Section 3.I: Respondent media usage and sewer authority campaign recall**

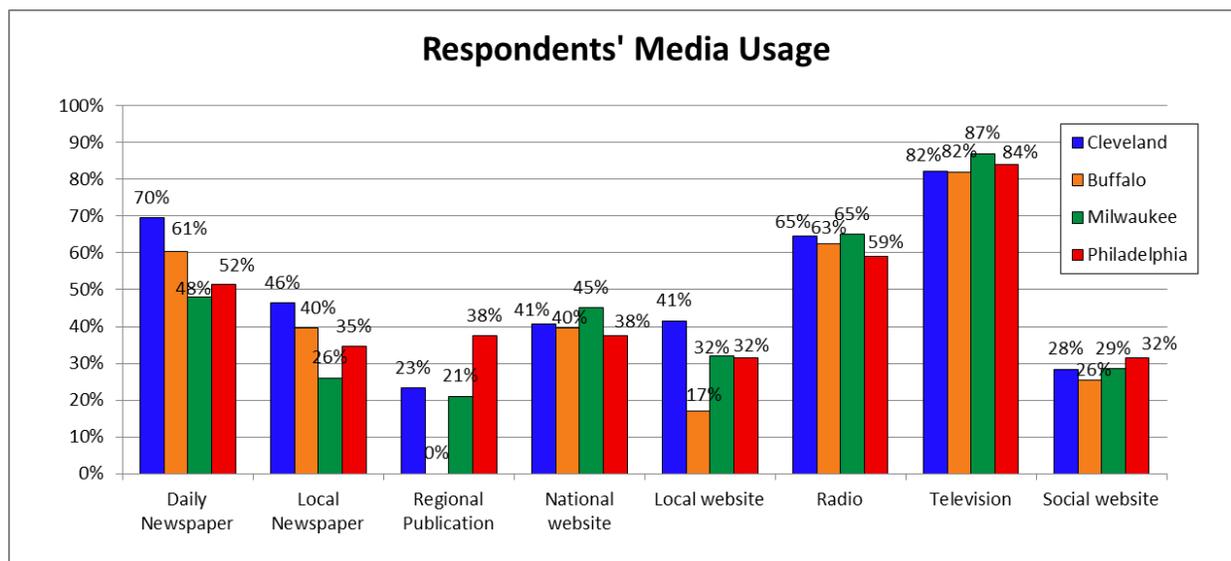
Section 3.I details the types of media used by respondents in the four regions, as well as their recognition of a variety of public awareness campaigns, including messaging conducted by the NEORS. D.

Figure 3.56 shows the primary media used by respondents. Not surprisingly, television is the most used media in the four regions. 87% of respondents in Milwaukee use television weekly as a news source, followed by 84% of Philadelphia respondents, and 82% of respondents in Cleveland and Buffalo. Radio follows, with 65% of respondents in Cleveland and Milwaukee using radio weekly for news, followed by 63% of respondents in Buffalo and 59% in Philadelphia. Daily newspapers are third in frequency of usage. Cleveland respondents had the highest frequency of usage at 70%, followed by Buffalo at 61%, Philadelphia at 52%, and Milwaukee at 48%.

National news websites such as CNN, Fox, and The New York Times were slightly lower in usage. Milwaukee respondents led in usage at 45%, followed by Cleveland respondents at 41%, Buffalo at 40%, and Philadelphia at 38%. Local newspapers such as the Sun Press were used most often by Cleveland respondents (46%), followed by Buffalo (40%), Philadelphia (35%), and Milwaukee (26%).

Local news websites, regional publications, and social websites came in at the lowest frequencies of usage in each of the regions. Local websites were used by 41% of Cleveland respondents, followed by 32% of Milwaukee and Philadelphia respondents and 17% of Buffalo residents. Social website usage was similar in each of the regions, with 32% usage by Philadelphia respondents, 29% by Milwaukee respondents, 28% by Cleveland respondents, and 26% of Buffalo respondents. About a quarter of Cleveland respondents (23%) use regional publications similar to Crain's Cleveland Business or Cleveland Magazine. Similar publication usage was higher among Philadelphia respondents (38%), and a bit lower among Milwaukee respondents (21%). There were no identifiable regional publications for Buffalo.

Figure 3.56: Primary media used by respondents



Figures 3.57 and 3.58 demonstrate a wide range of respondent recognition of various public campaigns. The iconic ‘I Love N.Y.’ campaign ranked first at 81% for Buffalo respondents, followed by ‘Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle,’ which was recognized by 75% of Buffalo respondents, 74% of Milwaukee respondents, 72% of Cleveland respondents, and 65% of Philadelphia respondents.

The NEORSRD campaigns did well in comparison to specific campaigns conducted by other sewer authorities. 47% of Cleveland respondents had heard or seen the slogan, ‘Keeping Our Great Lake Great.’ Interestingly, this was also recognized by 39% of Buffalo respondents, despite not ever being aired in that market. (It should be noted that Buffalo was the only sewer authority to not have any specific campaign slogan). Other NEORSRD campaign slogans also did well. The ‘Pick Up Poop – PUP’ program had been heard or seen by 33% of respondents. The ‘Where Does It Go’ campaign had 14% recognition, while 15% of respondents had heard of the Business Opportunity Program conducted by the NEORSRD.

The 47% recognition of the NEORSRD slogan ‘Keeping Our Great Lake Great’ was only exceeded by the 54% recognition of respondents in Milwaukee of the phrase, ‘Household Hazardous Waste Collection,’ which is a program rather than a campaign. Milwaukee’s campaign slogans had lower rates of recognition: 29% had heard or seen ‘Rain Gardens – Keeping Our Waterways Cleaner, One Flower at a Time.’ 12% of Milwaukee respondents had seen or heard the phrase, ‘H2O Info: Measuring the Health of Our Rivers.’

Philadelphia had a few campaign slogans that received decent recognition. ‘Green City, Clean Waters’ led in recognition at 26%, followed by ‘Your Watershed’ at 17%. The contest to name the ‘Philly Water’s Best Friend Spokesdog’ garnered 9% recognition, close to the tourism slogan used by the city, ‘Life, Liberty, and You’ (11% recognition).

Figure 3.57: Respondent recognition of public awareness campaigns

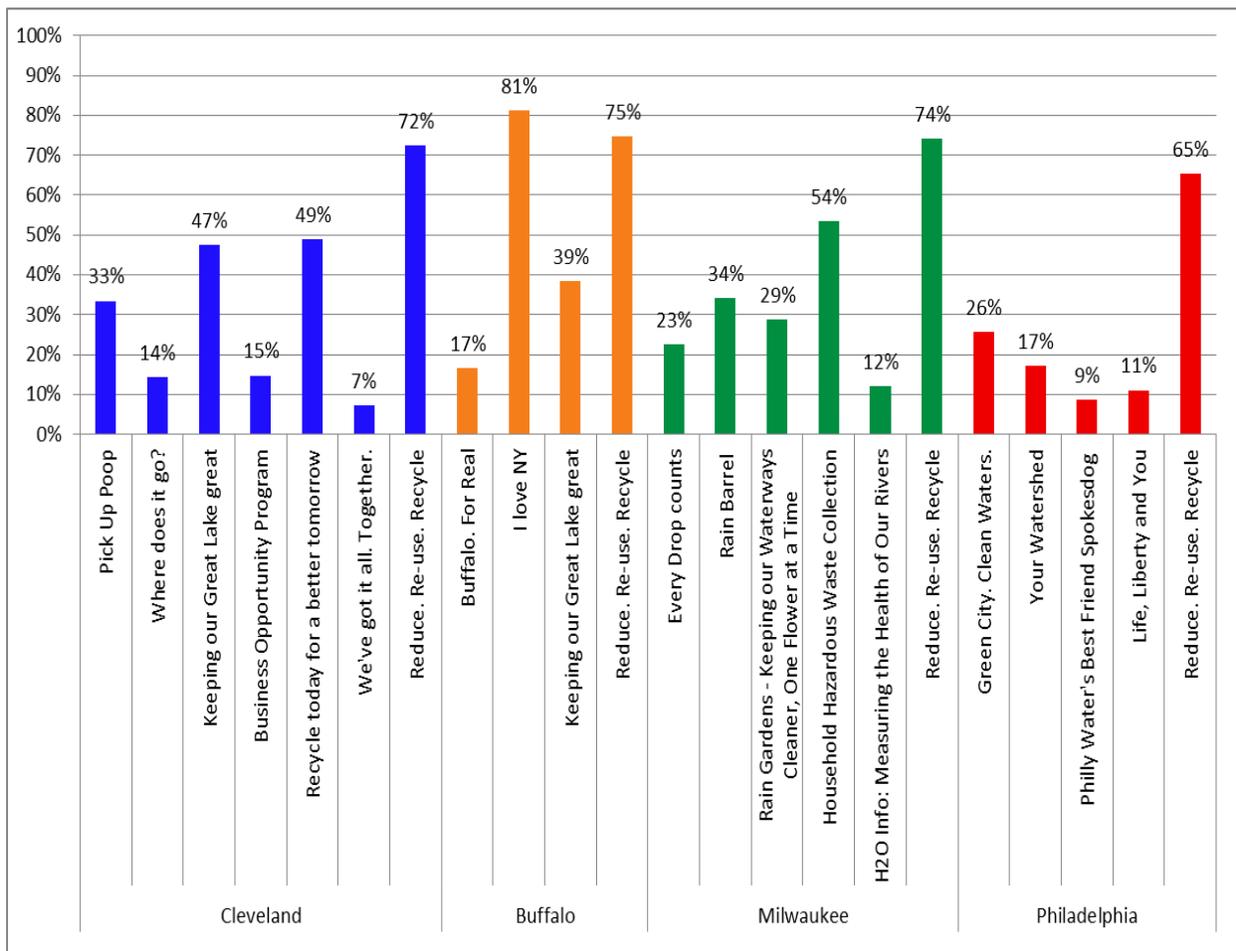
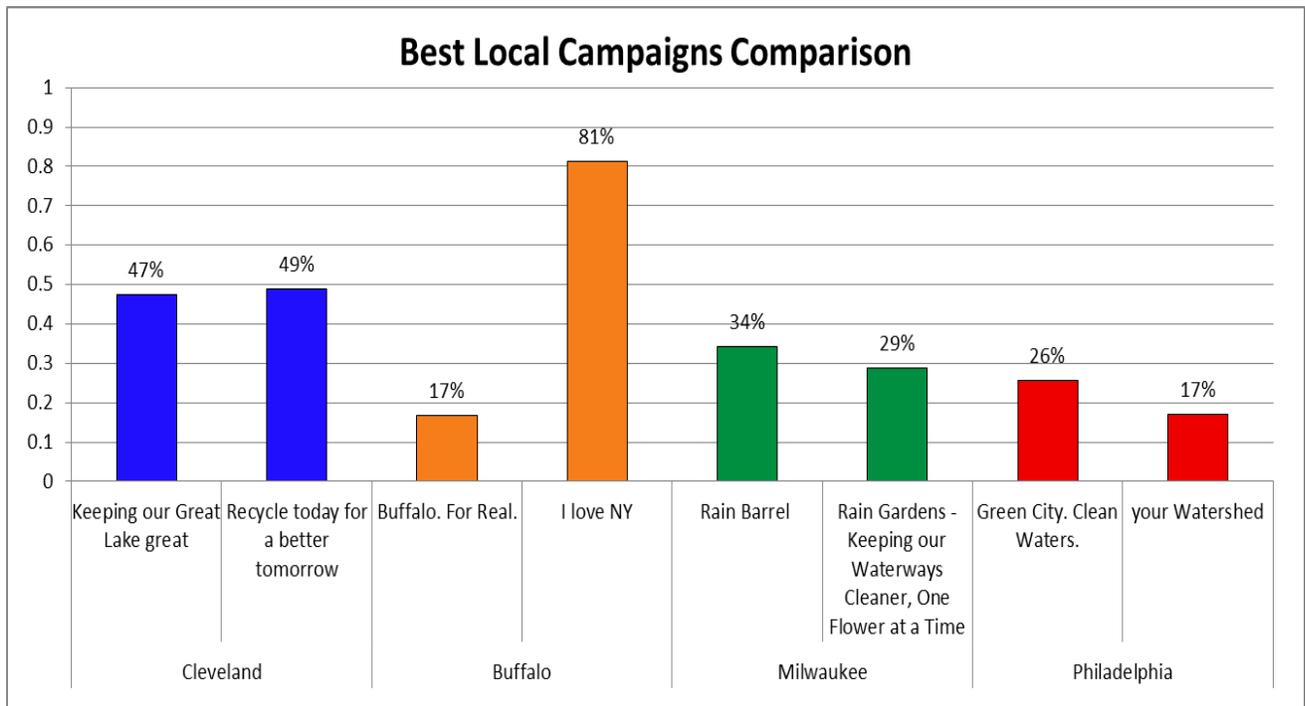


Figure 3.58: Comparison of recognition levels for best local campaigns



### Section 3.I.2: Respondent connection of campaign with agency

The following figures show which agencies respondents thought were the sponsors of each of the campaigns in the four surveyed regions. These were unaided, open-ended responses to the question, ‘Which agency do you think sponsored this campaign?’ The charts largely show that there is a wide variety of identification of agencies with campaigns, and often the identity is mistaken.

#### Section 3.I.2.a: Cleveland campaigns and agency sponsorship recognition

Figure 3.59: Pick Up Poop

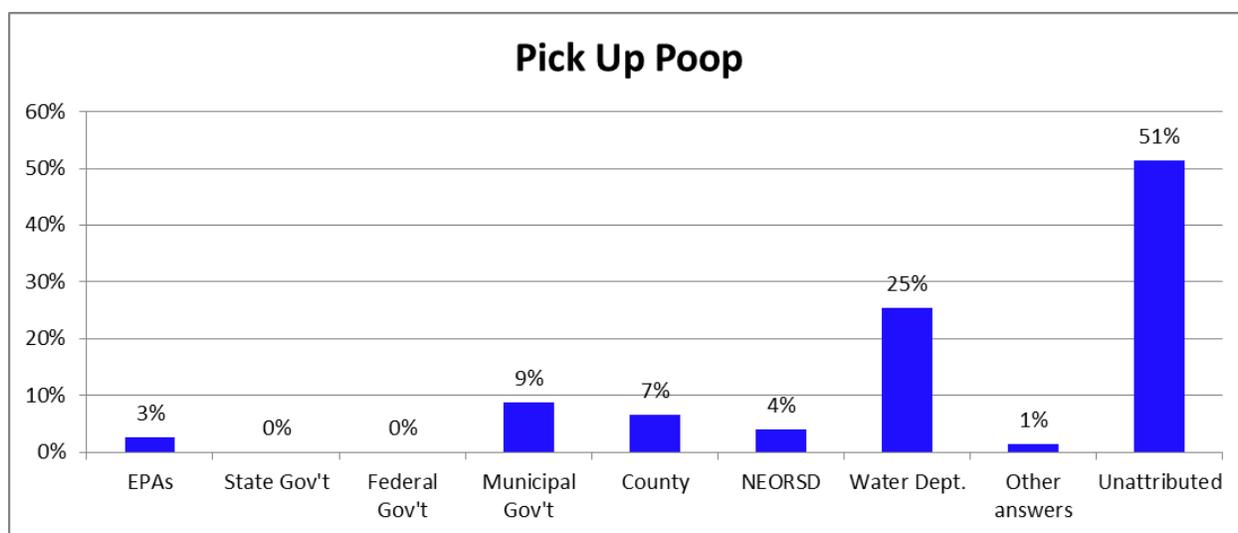


Figure 3.60: Where does it go?

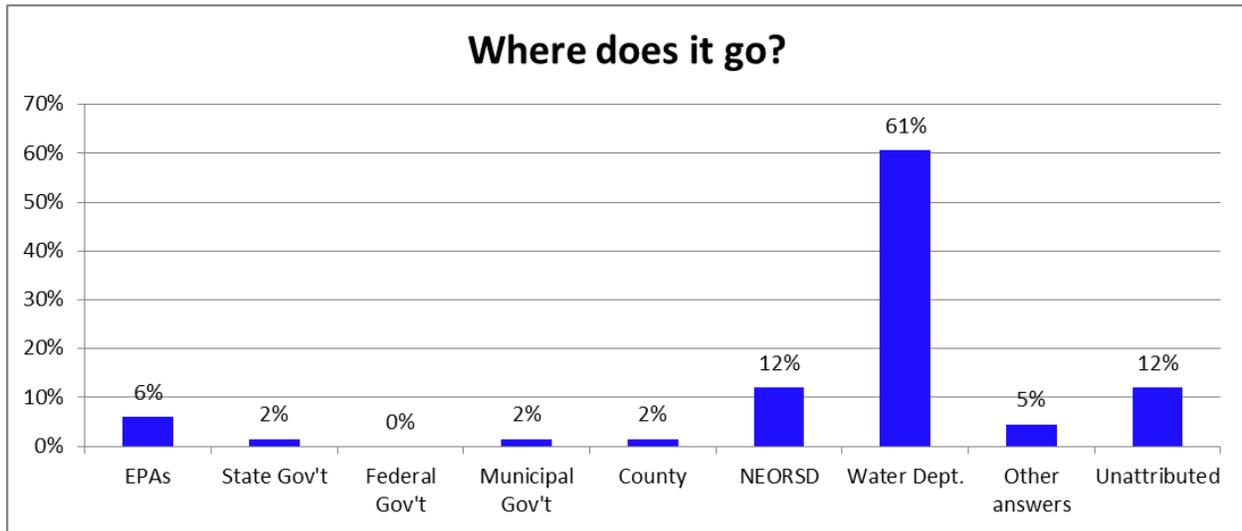


Figure 3.61: Keeping our Great Lake great.

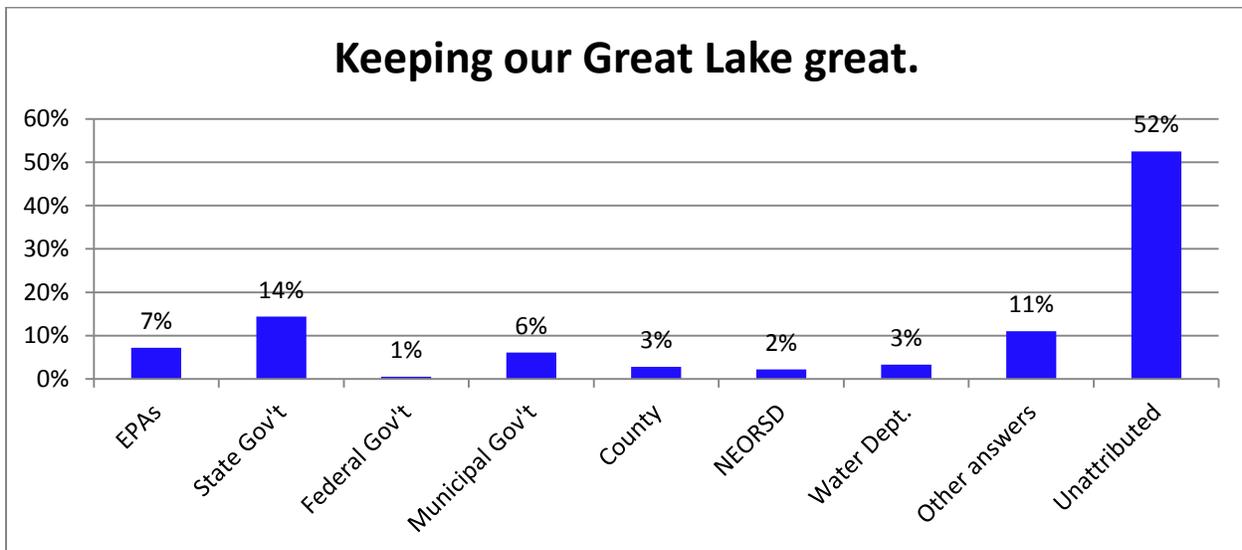


Figure 3.62: Business Opportunity Program

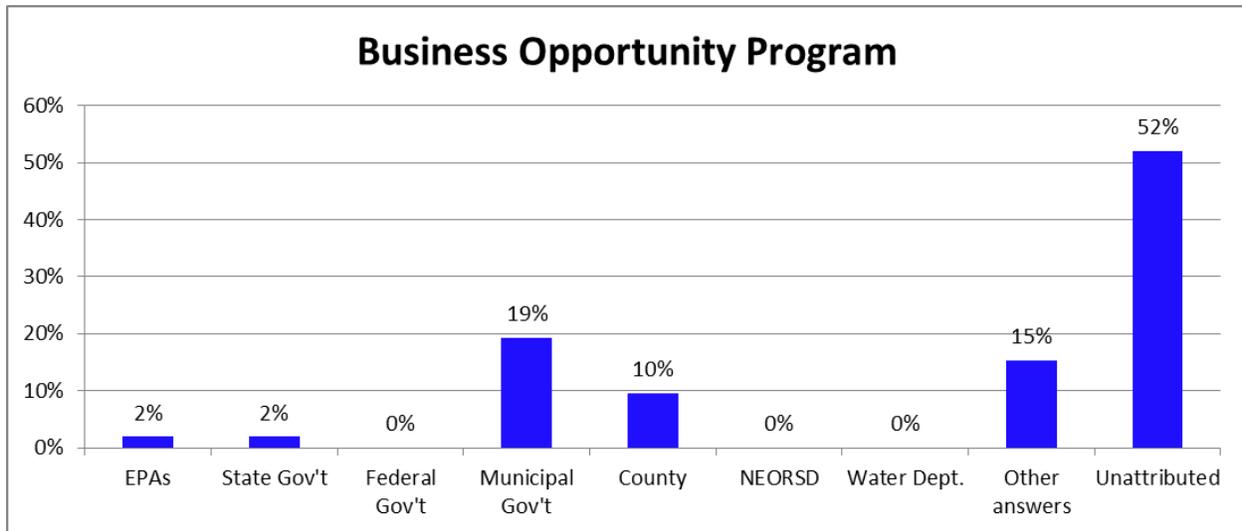


Figure 3.63: Recycle Today for a Better Tomorrow

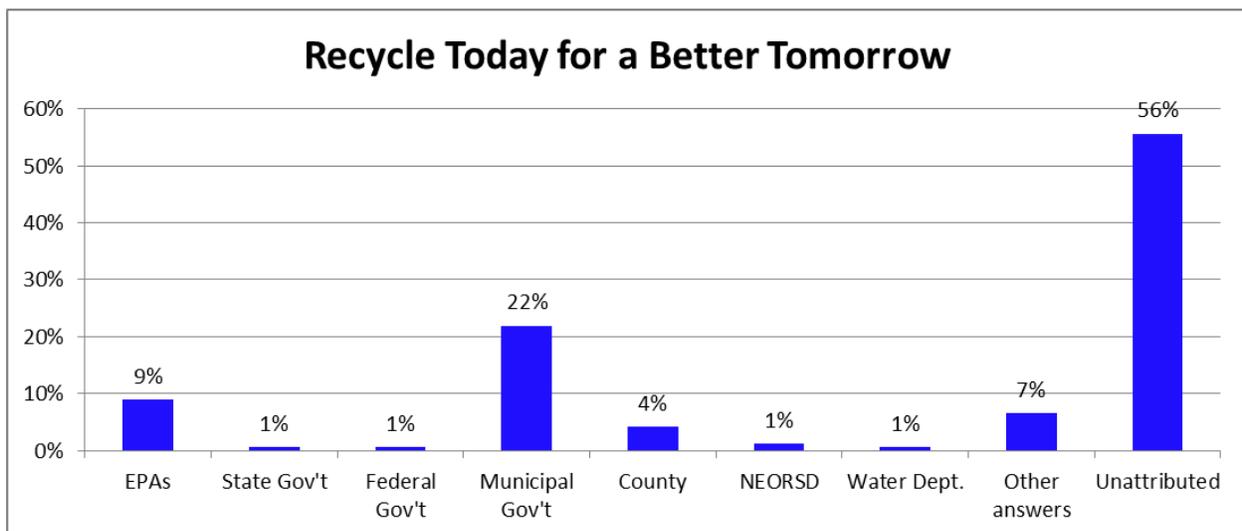


Figure 3.64: We've Got It All. Together.

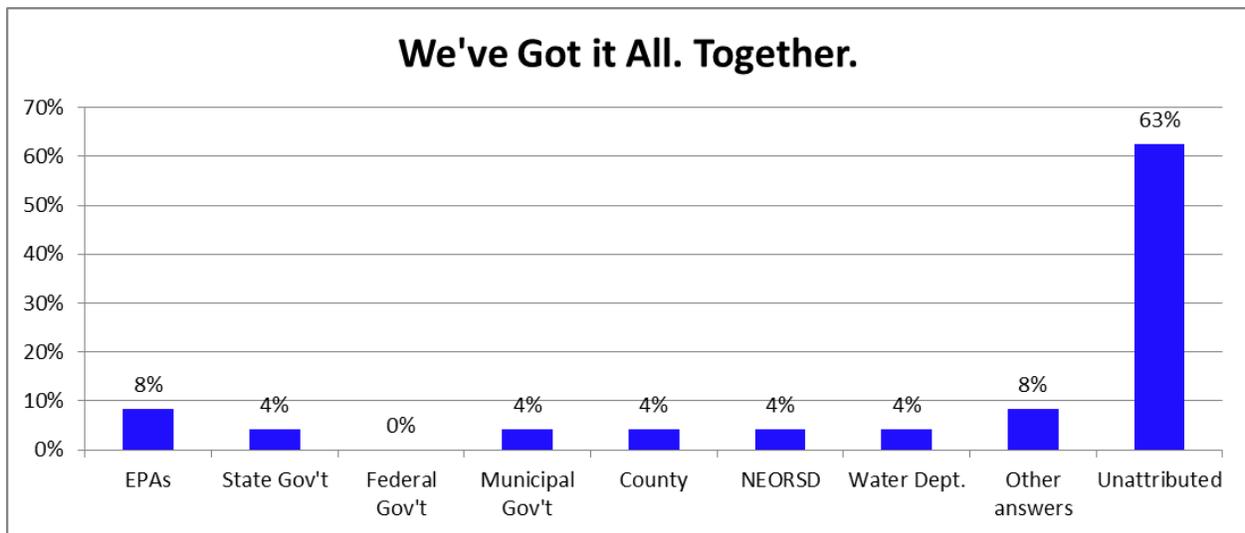
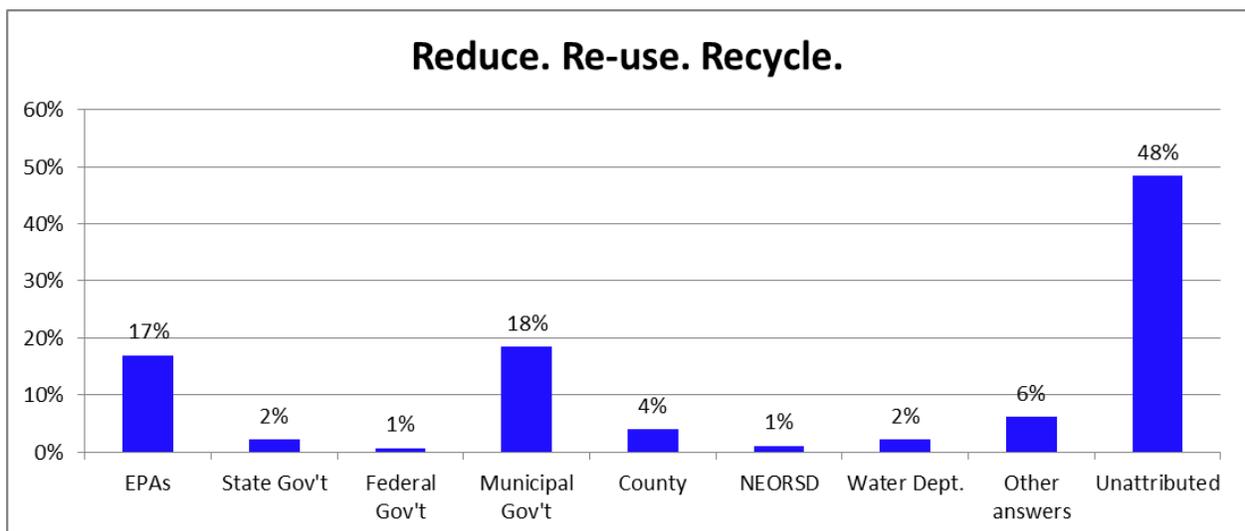


Figure 3.65: Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.



**Section 3.I.2.b: Buffalo campaigns and agency sponsorship recognition**

Figure 3.66: Buffalo. For Real.

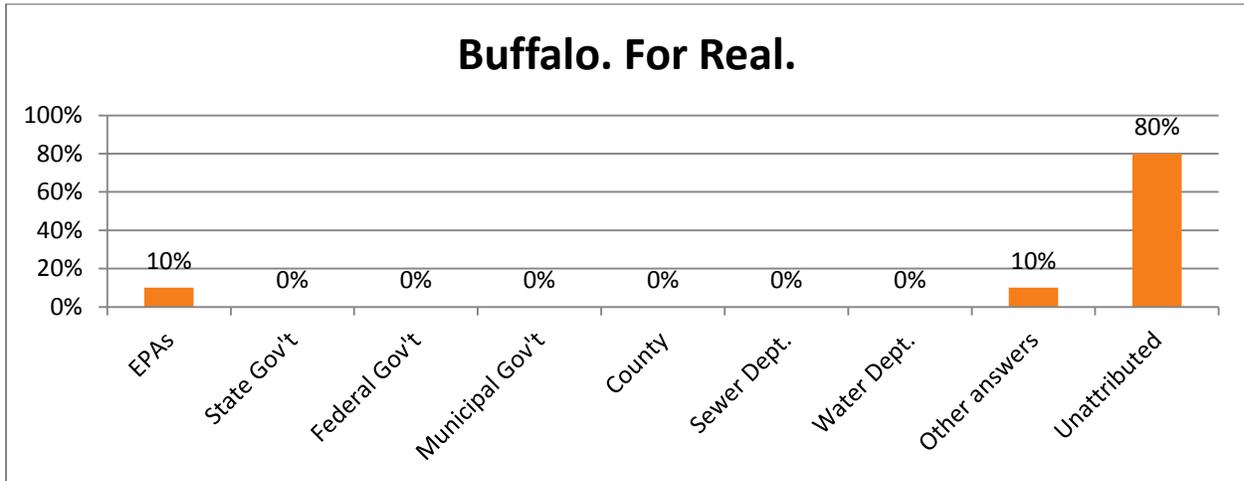


Figure 3.67: I Love New York

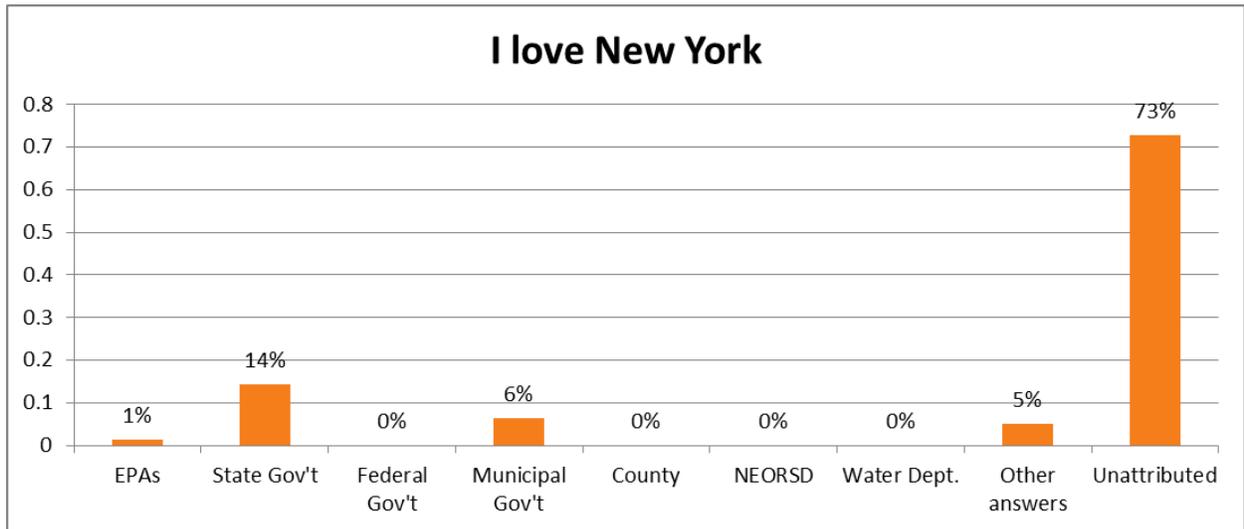


Figure 3.68: Keeping our Great Lake great.

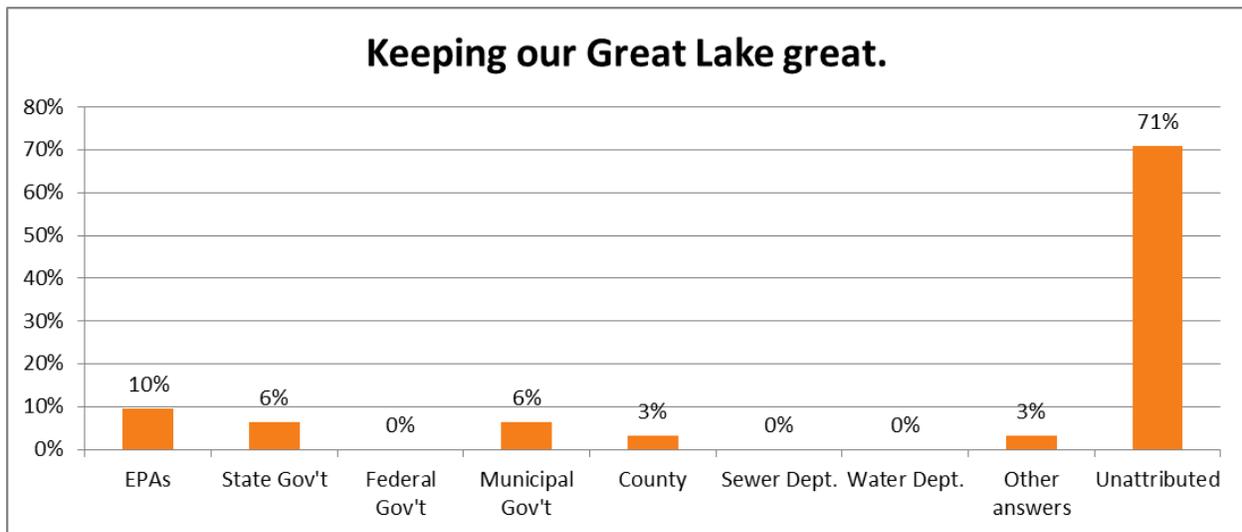
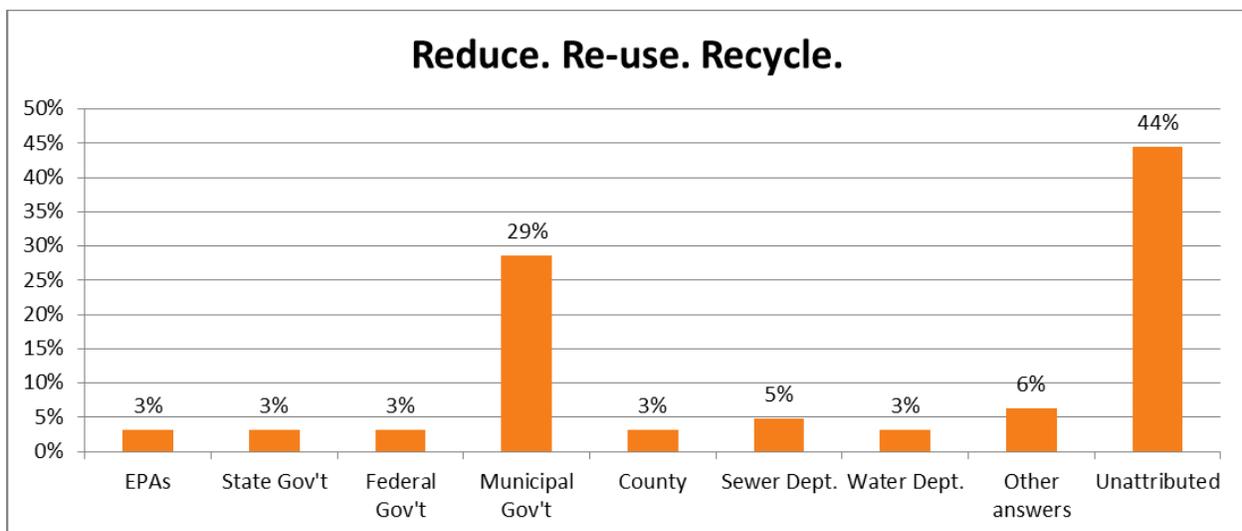


Figure 3.69: Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.



### Section 3.I.2.c: Milwaukee campaigns and agency sponsorship recognition

Figure 3.70: Every Drop Counts

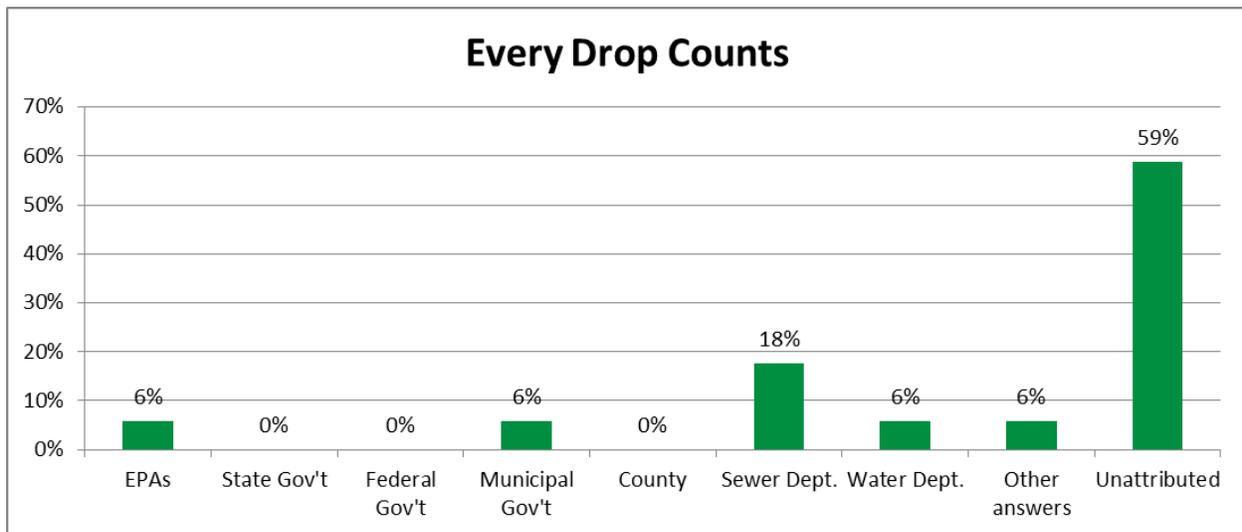


Figure 3.71: Rain Barrel Program

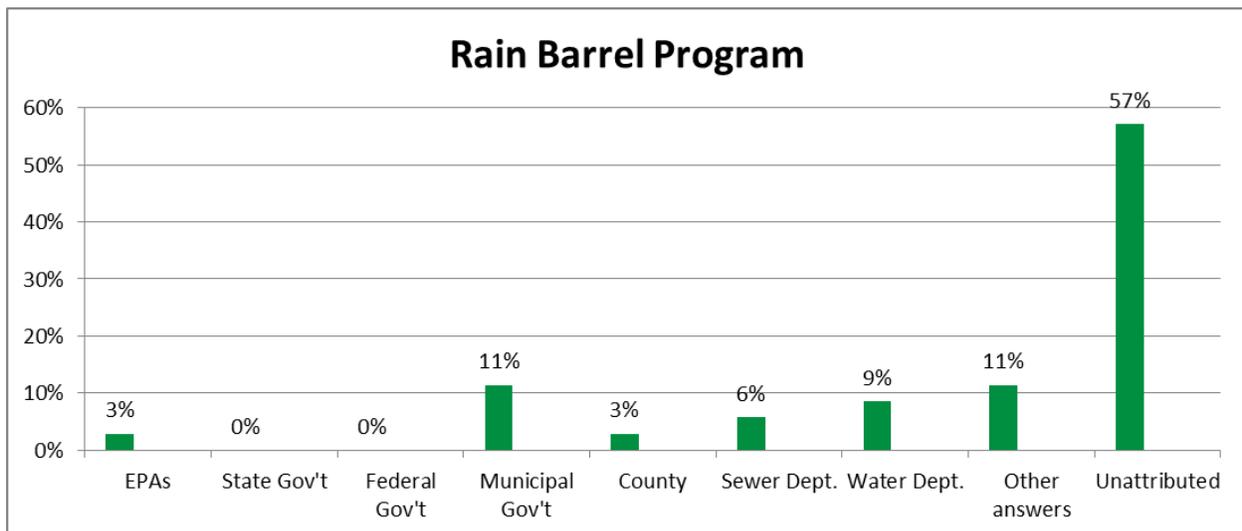


Figure 3.72: Rain Gardens – Keeping Our Waterways Cleaner, One Flower at a Time

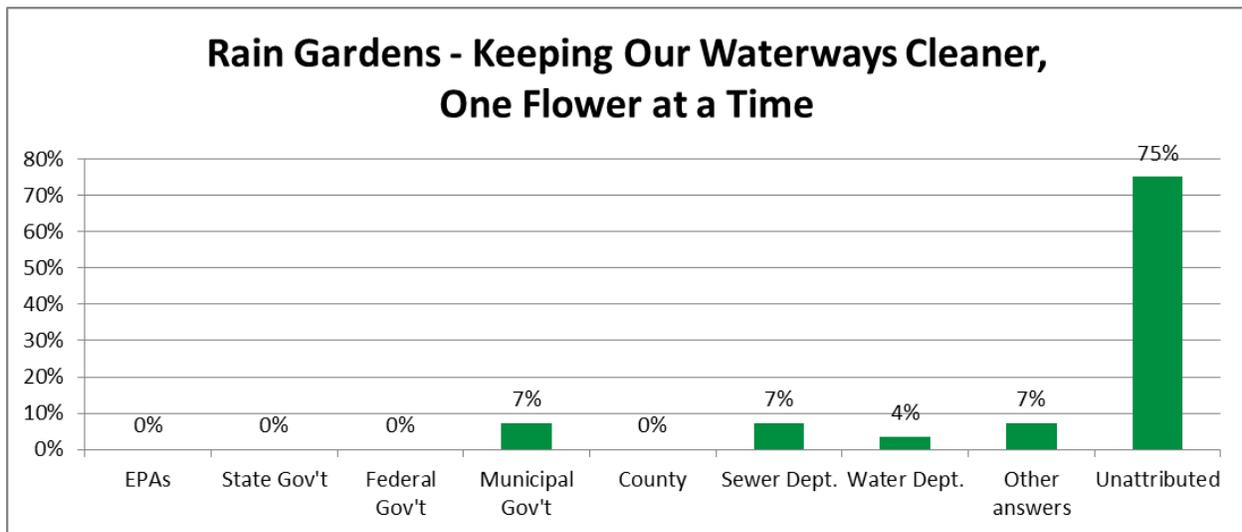


Figure 3.73: Household Hazardous Waste Collection

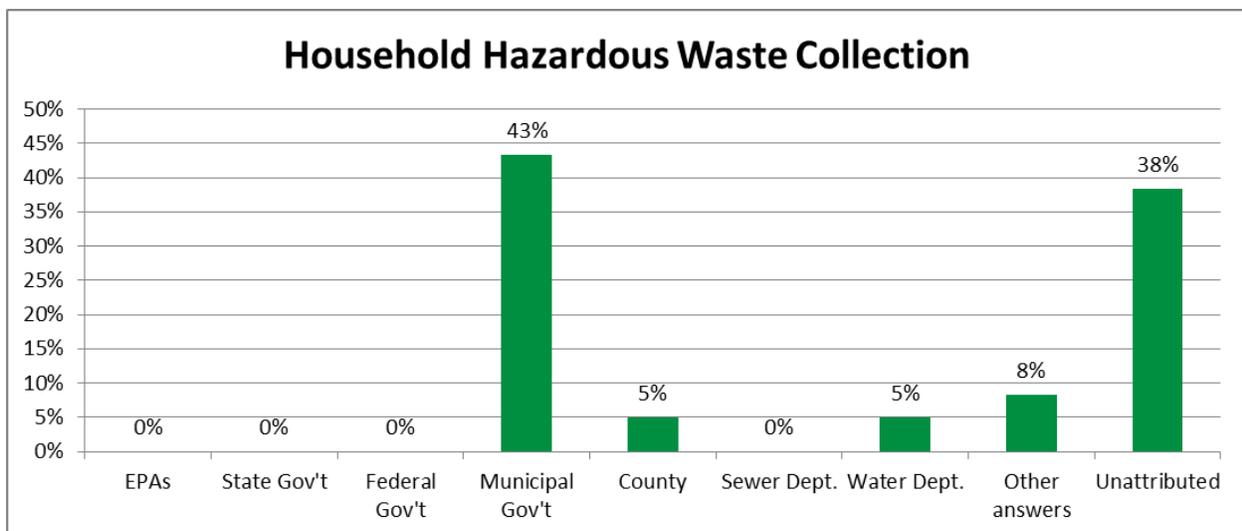


Figure 3.74: H2O Info: Measuring the Health of our Rivers

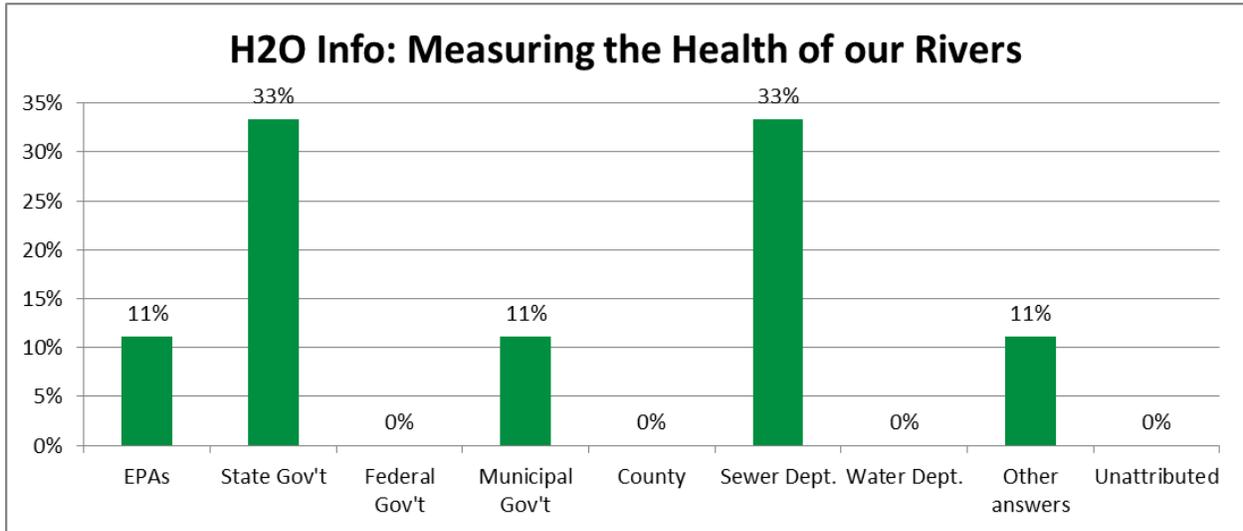
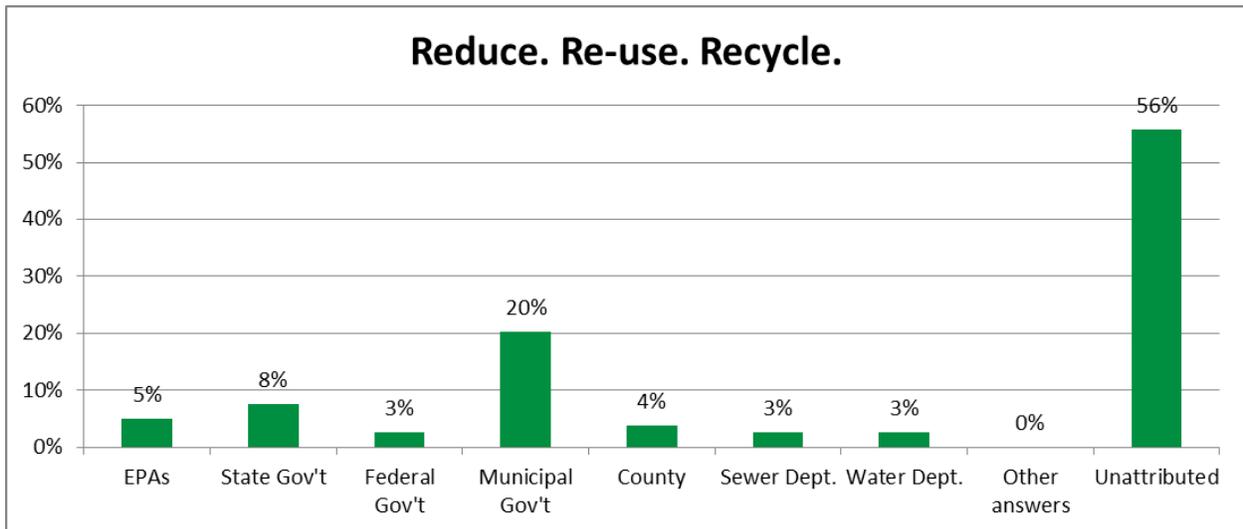


Figure 3.75: Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.



### Section 3.I.2.d: Philadelphia campaigns and agency sponsorship recognition

Figure 3.76: Green City, Clean Waters.

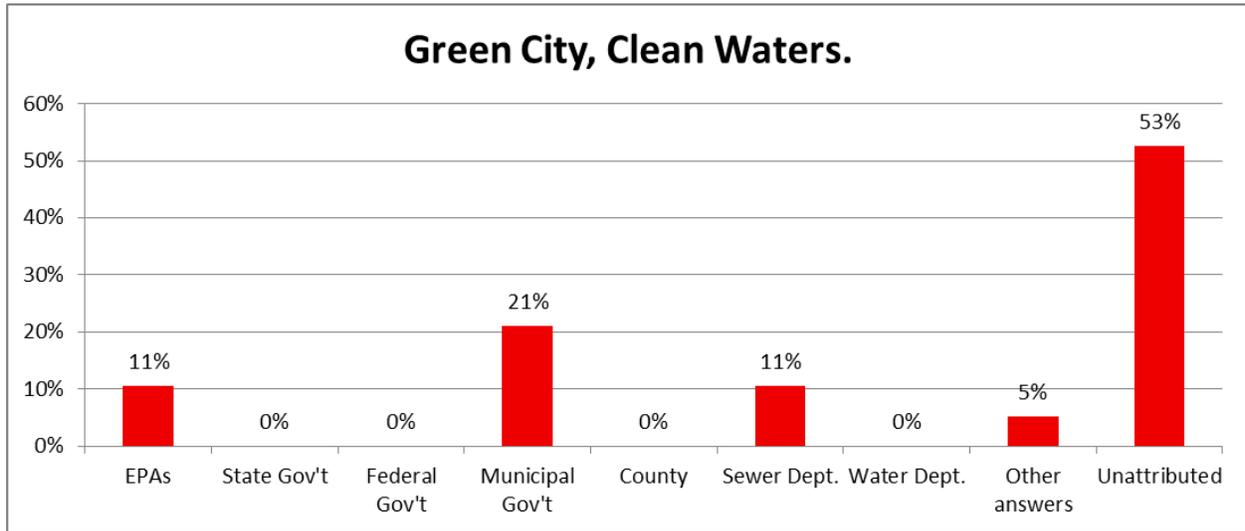


Figure 3.77: Your Watershed.

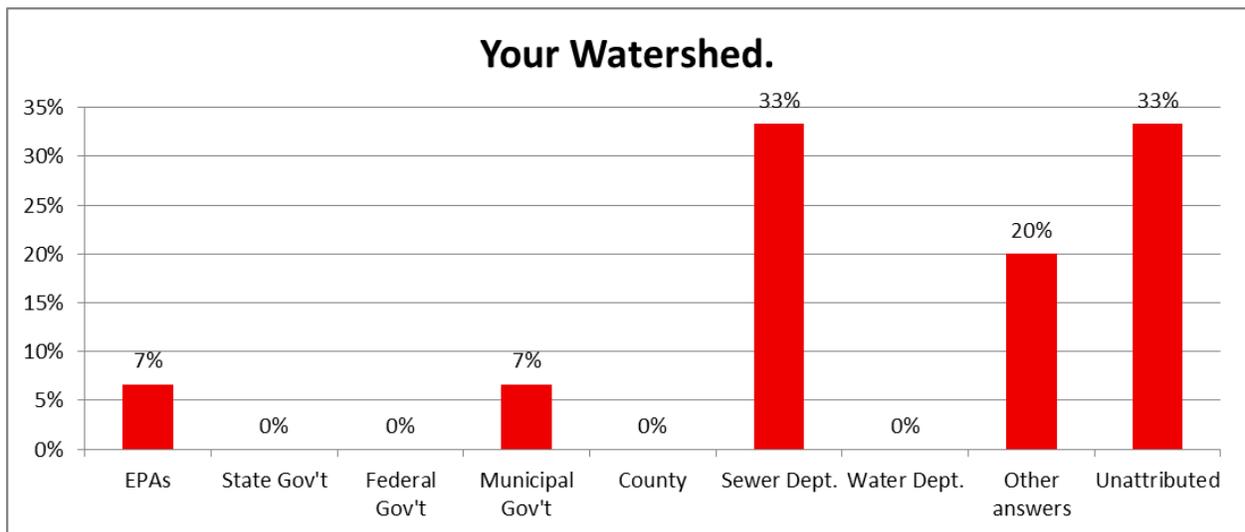


Figure 3.78: Philly Water's Best Friend Spokesdog

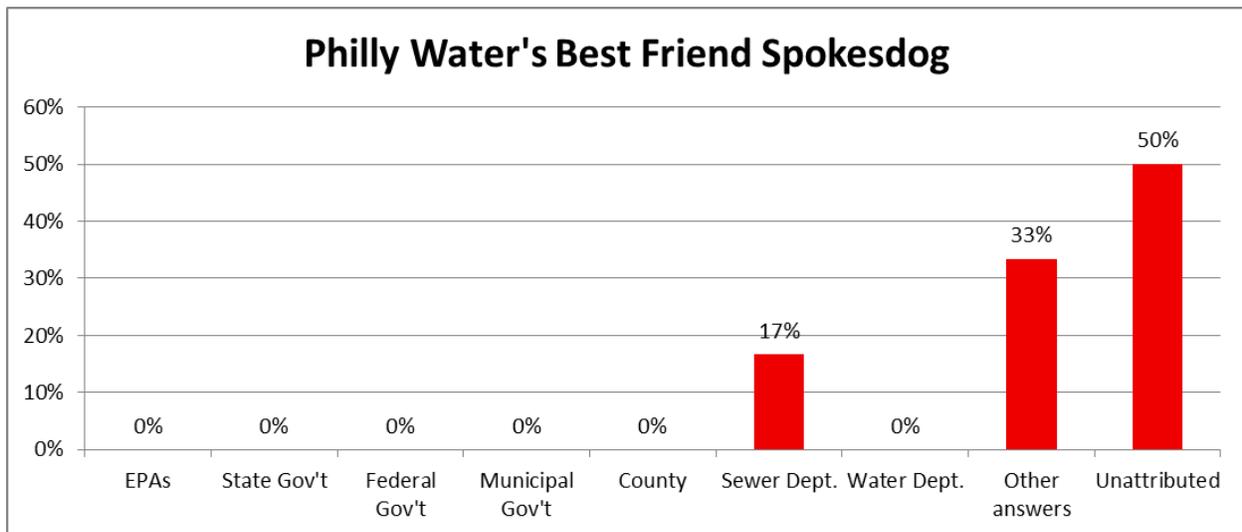


Figure 3.79: Life, Liberty, and You.

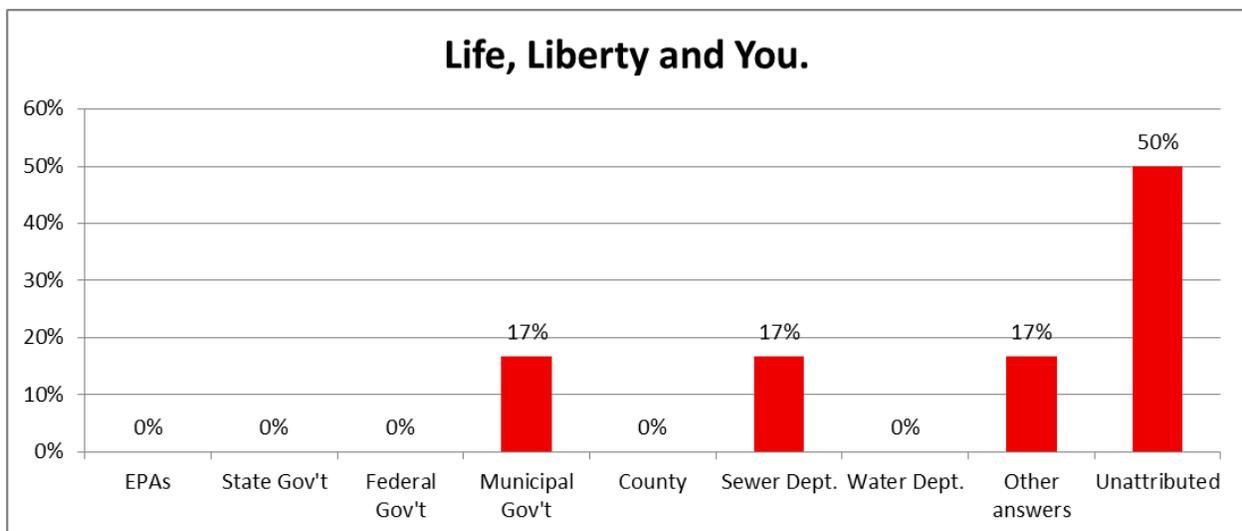


Figure 3.80: Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.

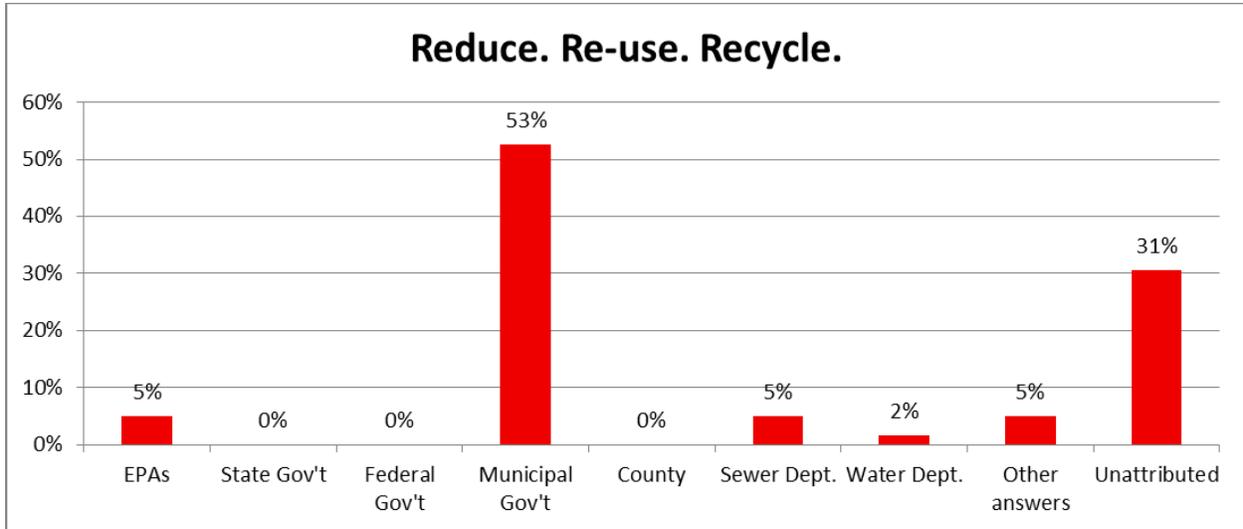
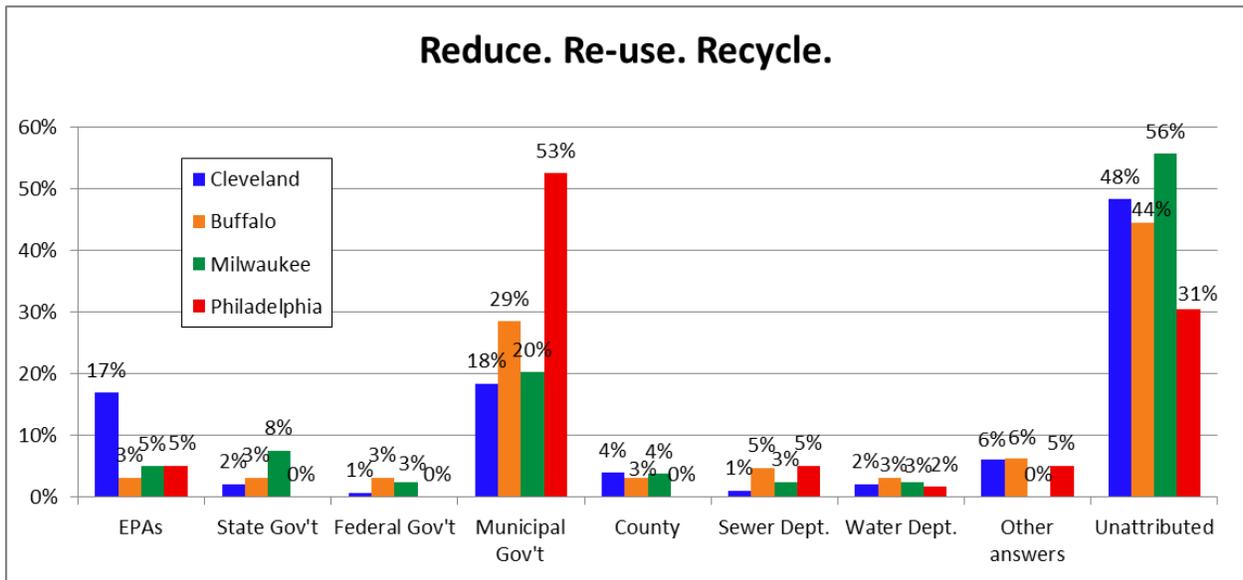


Figure 3.81: National campaign comparison – Reduce. Re-use. Recycle.



### Section 3.J: Survey respondent demographics

Figures 3.82 – 3.89 provide comparative demographic information for each of the four regions. In Figure 3.82, a range of home ownership is demonstrated, from a low of 72% for Philadelphia respondents to 90% of Cleveland area respondents.

Households with one or two adults had about a ten point range across the four regions of the survey. Figure 3.83 shows that Philadelphia had the lowest percentage of single adult households (34%), followed by Cleveland (37%), Buffalo (39%), and Milwaukee (47%). Households with two adults ranged from a low of 36% for Milwaukee to 43% for Buffalo, 44% for Cleveland, and 45% for Philadelphia. Households with three or more adults ranged from 21% for Philadelphia to 19% for Cleveland and Buffalo, to 17% for Milwaukee.

Figure 3.84 shows that over half of Cleveland respondent households (56%) had no children, compared to 50% for Milwaukee, 42% for Buffalo, and 29% for Philadelphia. 56% of Philadelphia households had one or two children, compared to 44% of Buffalo households and 34% of Cleveland and Milwaukee households. 17% of Milwaukee households had three or more children, followed by 15% of Philadelphia households, 14% of Buffalo households, and 11% of Cleveland households.

The survey tilted towards women, with respondent samples ranging from 60% in Milwaukee to 64% in Buffalo, 67% in Cleveland, and 68% in Philadelphia, as shown in Figure 3.85. This is typical of landline phone surveys, which tend to have higher response rates among women.

Cleveland had the highest levels of educational attainment of the four regions according to Figure 3.86. 21% of Cleveland respondents hold a bachelor's degree, while an additional 27% hold a graduate or professional degree. This 47% total compares to 36% for Buffalo, 33% for Milwaukee, and 25% for Philadelphia. In contrast, 36% of Philadelphia respondents had finished with a high school diploma or GED, compared with 32% of Milwaukee respondents, 30% of Buffalo respondents, and 18% of Cleveland respondents. Those with some college ranged from 27% in Philadelphia to 30% in Cleveland. Respondents who did not finish high school included 4% in Cleveland, 5% in Buffalo, 8% in Milwaukee, and 12% in Philadelphia.

Annual household income distribution was fairly similar across the four regions. Figure 3.87 shows that low annual household incomes of less than \$20,000 comprised 14% of Cleveland respondents, 16% of Milwaukee, 23% of Philadelphia, and 26% of Buffalo. Households with \$20,000 - \$40,000 in annual income ranged from 21% in Cleveland, 23% in Milwaukee, 24% in Buffalo, and 30% in Philadelphia. Households with \$40,000 - \$60,000 in annual income ranged from 22% of Philadelphia and Cleveland, 23% of Buffalo, and 28% of Milwaukee. Annual household incomes of \$60,000 - \$80,000 comprise 10% of Milwaukee, 14% of Buffalo and Philadelphia, and 17% of Cleveland. Cleveland led with higher household incomes: 26% were at or above \$80,000, compared with 23% of Milwaukee, 13% of Buffalo, and 11% of Philadelphia.

There were significant differences in the ethnic composition of the four regions. According to Figure 3.88, Caucasian respondents ranged from 76% of Cleveland households to 59% of Milwaukee, 58% of Buffalo, and 32% of Philadelphia. African-Americans were the largest group in the Philadelphia sample at 49%, followed by 35% of the Buffalo sample, 29% of the Milwaukee sample, and 17% of the Cleveland sample. Hispanic-Americans ranged from 1% in

Cleveland to 2% in Buffalo, 5% in Milwaukee, and 6% in Philadelphia. Asian-Americans were 1% of the Cleveland and Buffalo households, 3% of Milwaukee, and 6% of Philadelphia households. Respondents who chose 'other' constituted 4% of Milwaukee, 5% of Cleveland and Buffalo, and 8% of Philadelphia.

Very high percentages of respondents across the four regions identified as registered voters. Figure 3.89 shows that Cleveland was the highest with 95%, followed by Buffalo and Milwaukee at 89%, and Philadelphia at 88%.

Figure 3.82: Household status

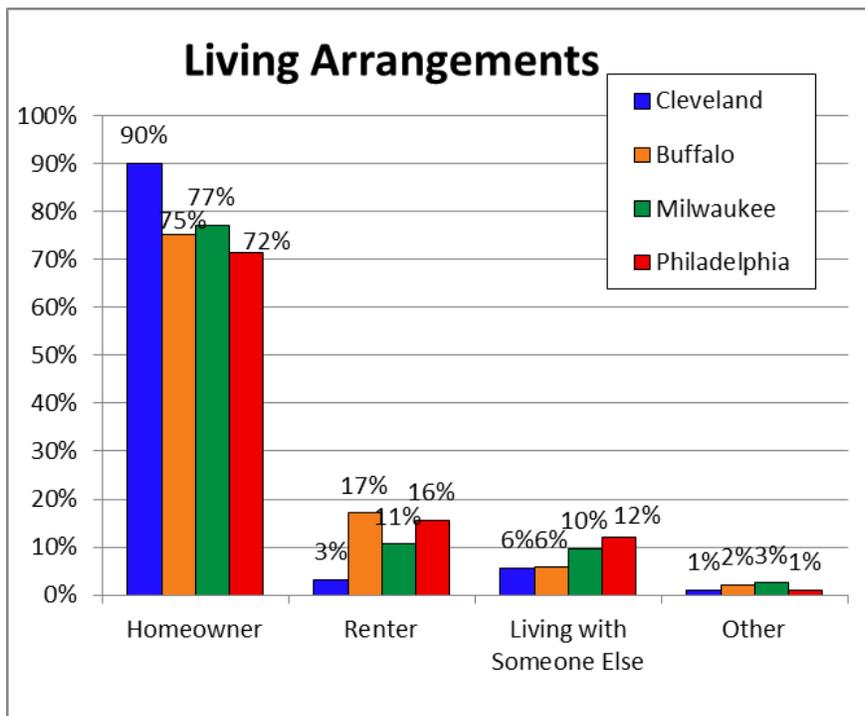


Figure 3.83: Number of adults in household

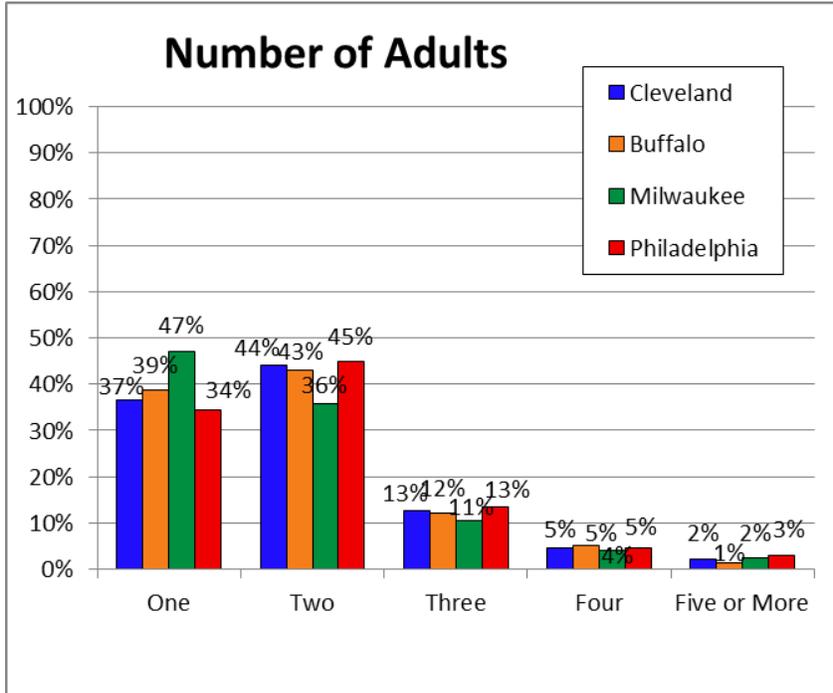


Figure 3.84: Number of children in household

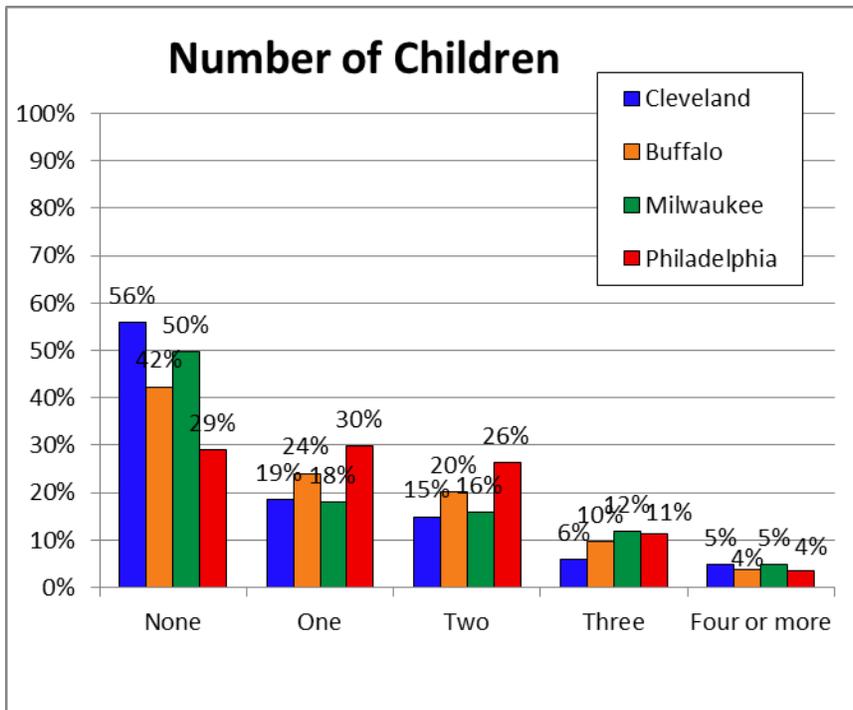


Figure 3.85: Respondent gender

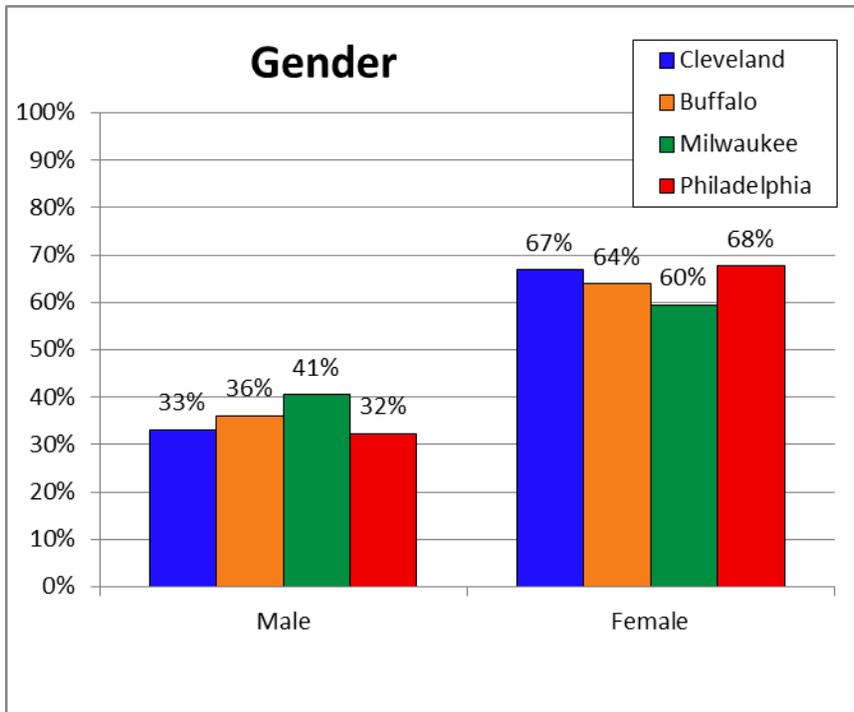


Figure 3.86: Respondent education level

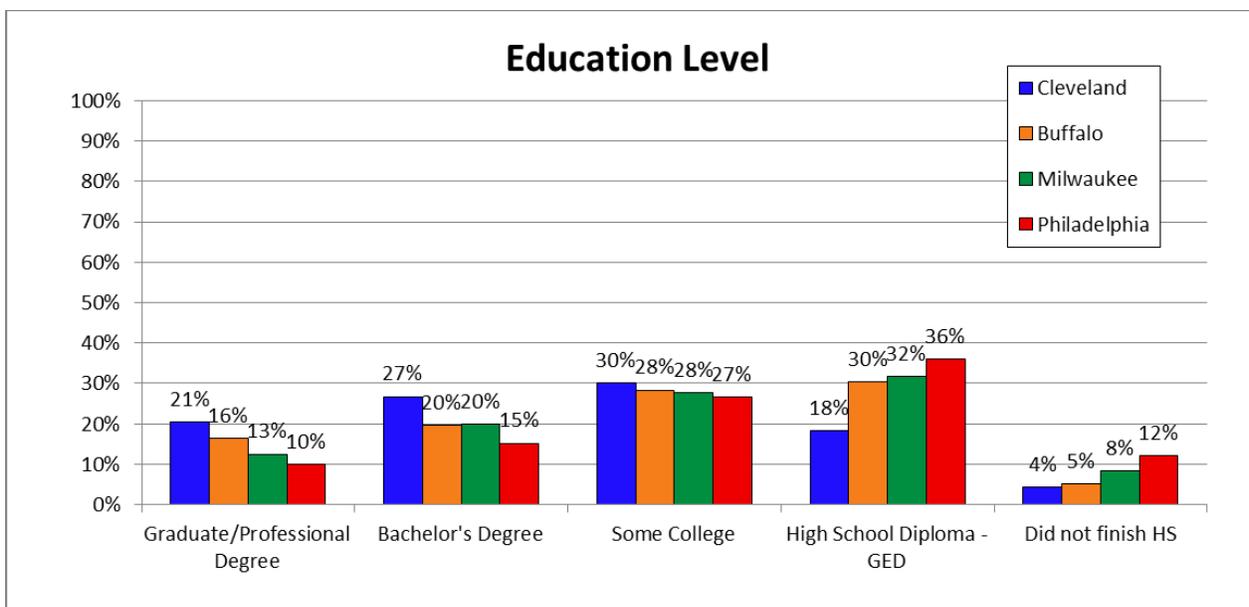


Figure 3.87: Respondent annual household income

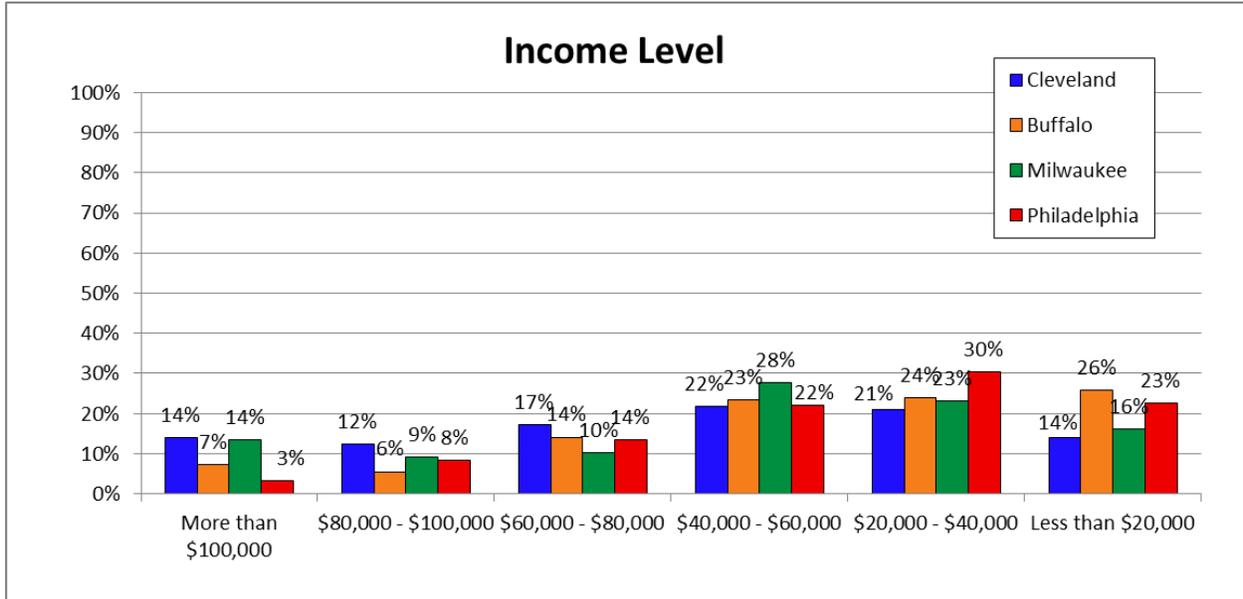


Figure 3.88: Respondent ethnic background

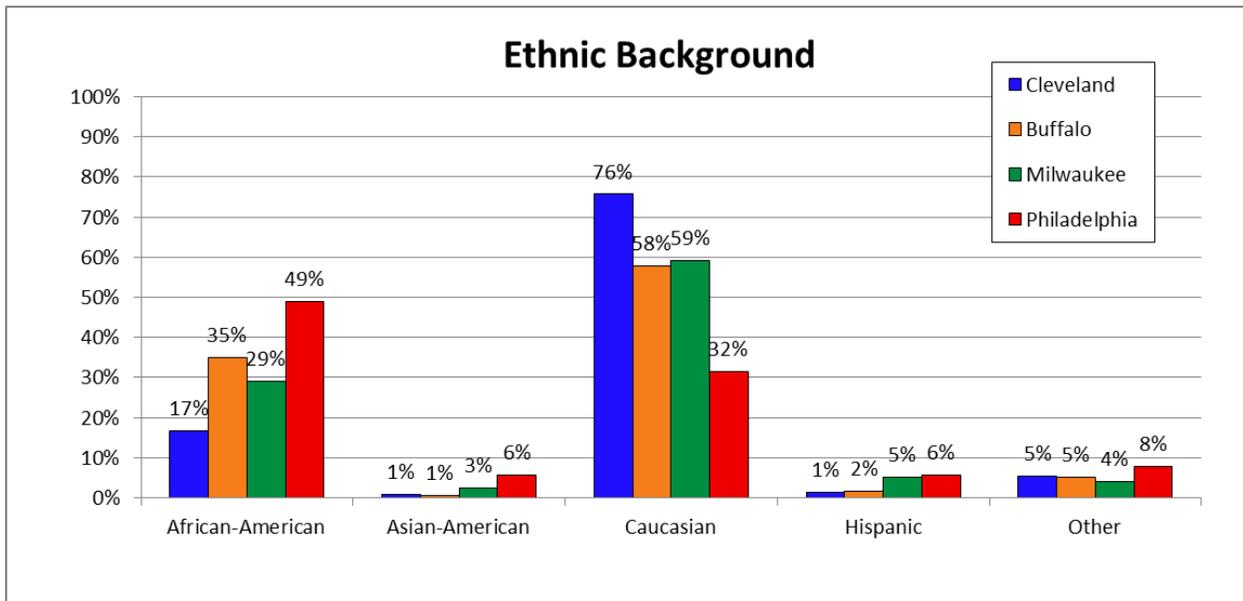
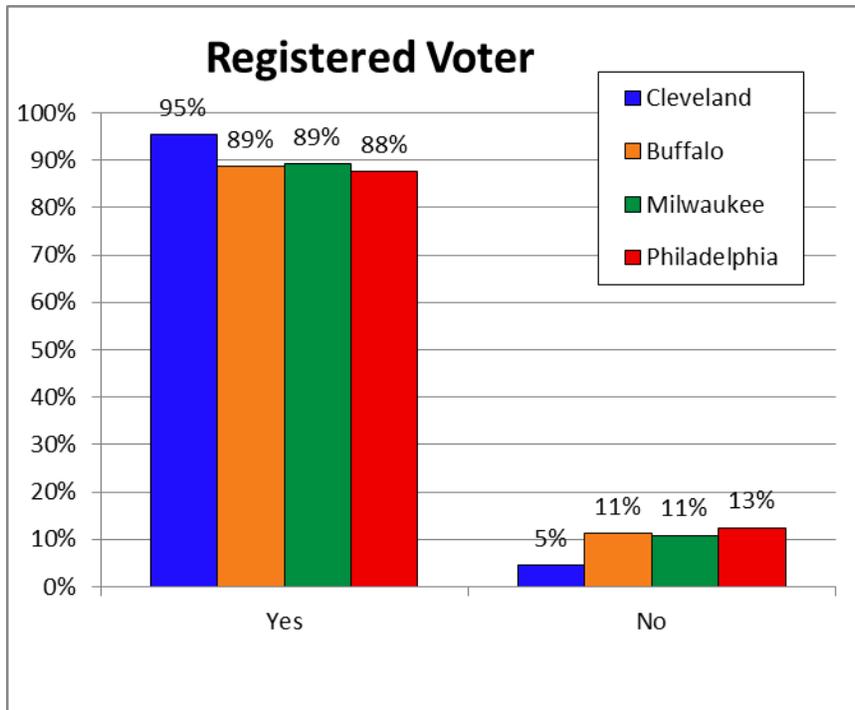


Figure 3.89: Is respondent a registered voter?



## Part II: NEORS D Qualitative Data and Findings

### Section 4: Focus Group data and analysis

The NEORS D study includes collection and analysis of qualitative data from household and business NEORS D customers in order to develop an understanding of their perceptions about the quality and value of NEORS D services. Eight focus groups were conducted of customers of the NEORS D. Four of the focus groups were comprised of respondents to the household customer phone survey, and four with representatives of businesses and nonprofits located in the NEORS D service region. Participants in the focus groups represented communities in the east, west, and south regions of the NEORS D, as well as the city of Cleveland. The focus groups were conducted during the evenings of August 13-16, 2012. The household and business focus groups for the west, south, and Cleveland regions were held the first three evenings at the Baldwin Wallace University Center for Innovation and Growth, located in Berea, Ohio. The east region focus groups were conducted on August 16<sup>th</sup> at the BW East campus in Beachwood, Ohio. Each evening featured focus groups that were conducted during the times of 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. and 8:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. The focus groups were organized and coordinated by Kim Szczepinski. Tom Sutton conducted each of the focus groups, which were audio recorded. Verbatim transcripts were developed from the audio recordings and were analyzed using the ATLAS hermeneutic qualitative data analytics program.

As shown in Table 4.1, there were 84 participants in the focus groups. The number of participants for each type of group ranged from 13 – 15 for the household focus groups, and 5 – 9 for the business/nonprofit focus groups. Participants in the household phone survey who agreed to a follow up contact were invited to participate. Of the 830 people who completed the phone survey, 211 agreed to be contacted to participate in the focus groups. All respondents invited to participate for the Cleveland and East regions were drawn from the survey sample. The west and south regions were under-represented; additional names were added to these lists to fill out the focus groups. A list of small business and nonprofit organizations was developed for each region and contacts made to build the business focus groups. The individual names of focus group participants can be found in Appendix 3.

Table 4.1: Focus group participant data summary

Focus group region	Date	Number of participants
West households	Monday, 8/13/12, 6:30 pm	15
West businesses	Monday, 8/13/12, 8:00 pm	9
Cleveland households	Tuesday, 8/14/12, 6:30 pm	13
Cleveland businesses	Tuesday, 8/14/12, 8:00 pm	7
South households	Wednesday, 8/15/12, 8:00 pm	14
South businesses	Wednesday, 8/15/12, 6:30 pm	7
East households	Thursday, 8/16/12, 6:30 pm	14
East businesses	Thursday, 8/16/12, 8:00 pm	5

The results of the focus groups are reported in two sections. Section 4.A presents specific points made across the focus groups under each of the questions used to guide each group's discussion. In particular, evaluative comments about NEORSD services, as well as suggestions for public outreach, were the most important findings in the focus groups. It is noted that focus groups gather qualitative data that presents the ideas of specific members of the group. While the groups were formed to represent household and business customers in the four regions of the NEORSD, the data should not be interpreted to represent a scientific sampling of the population of NEORSD customers.

Section 4.B analyzes aggregated coded data from across the eight focus groups. ATLAS Hermeneutics, a qualitative data analysis program was used to code each of the focus groups and aggregate the results. The focus group transcripts were coded to highlight key topics discussed in each group. The codes were then added together, with the results presented in tables 4.2 – 4.9. Each table's results are analyzed to provide interpretation and context for the aggregated data. The analysis begins with discussion of patterns of responses observed across the four regions and the two categories of participants.

## Section 4.A: Highlight points made in focus groups

Each focus group was asked nine questions designed to gather data concerning billing, experience with the Customer Service Center, perceptions about the effectiveness of the NEORSD, awareness of rate increases and the stormwater management program, ideas for public outreach, judgment of the economic value of keeping Lake Erie clean, and participation in public meetings. The same questions were used for both the household and business focus groups, with each group being asked the questions in the same sequence. An additional question about how to disseminate information about beach and water quality was asked of the household focus groups (Q. #6).

Each focus group lasted about one hour. The transcripts of the audio recordings averaged 10,994 words for the household focus groups, and 9,165 words for the business focus groups. Word counts include comments and questions posed by the focus group facilitator, which was 23% of the total comments. While the focus groups concentrated on drawing out ideas and perceptions from participants, there was also time spent by the facilitator answering specific questions of participants about the NEORSD. These tended to concentrate in the areas of why rates were rising, details about the CSO abatement and stormwater management programs, and relationships between the NEORSD and municipal governments.

Summaries of the points made by focus group participants responding to each of the questions are provided below as bullet points under each question. The points are representative of what was said in the groups. Frequencies of responses are reported and analyzed above in Section 4.A.

### Focus group questions and summary responses

*1. Which agency is responsible for sending your water and sewer bill? How often are you billed? Have you noticed changes to your billing amounts?*

1.a. Most participants understand that the water department (primarily Cleveland Water) is responsible for billing for water and sewer rates. Most participants had quarterly billing; some had bi-monthly, and a very few (e.g., Lakewood, Cleveland Heights) are on a monthly cycle.

1.b. There are strong concerns about rising rates for water and sewer; a few had specific details about how much their rates had increased, ranging from 25% - 60% over the past year. The perception that rates are going up at a rapid rate is compounded by having both water and sewer rates increasing, as well as by the magnitude created by quarterly billing (rate increases appear much higher when reported for three month periods instead of monthly.)

1.c. There were a lot of questions about costs of Project Clean Lake. Each group asked about how much rates would rise, for how long, and what the project will cost. There was a consistent level of questioning, ranging from mild concern to deep skepticism about the cost of the project and why ratepayers had to bear the burden of the cost. Some asked about whether other sources of funding were available. Many expressed concern about the effect of increasing rates on people who are living on fixed incomes or are unemployed. The timing of rate increases during

the recession was questioned in some of the groups, particularly the West and South household groups.

1.d. Participants who get the homestead exemption have not seen big increases, but know others who have. One participant thought his bill went up 100%. Another said it increased, but he also had increased usage.

*2. Have you ever called the NEORSD Customer Service Center for assistance? If so, what was your experience?*

2.a. Most participants who have called customer service have called the Water department, primarily concerning questions about billing and installation of new water meters. One or two participants in half the groups had called the NEORSD Customer Service Center (CSC) directly.

2.b. Experience with the NEORSD CSC was mixed. Two participants said they were helped with their questions in an efficient manner (billing and sewer overflow.) One commented about the rapid response of the NEORSD investigating a basement flooding problem (it turned out to be the local municipality's responsibility to fix.)

2.c. Not sure who was called – only one number to call available on the bill.

2.d. Some have called the Cleveland Water Department and said they were treated well. Others noted getting up to a 40% discount on their water bill in Cleveland, and thought this was good service.

2.e. One participant had a lot of trouble with getting accurate water and sewer bills for a small apartment/retail building in Cleveland. He had to visit the Cleveland Water Department a few times to get an accurate bill; complained that with new technology this should not still be happening.

*3. The NEORSD is responsible for providing your sewer services. How effective do you think the District is in their work?*

3.a. NEORSD is effective at treating sewage and managing the lines it owns. A few participants have noticed the NEORSD logo on storm sewer drain covers, with warnings about dumping waste; they think this is effective messaging to the public about their work.

3.b. The West households group asked about the governance of the NEORSD. There is a perception that it is independent of local control. After explaining the composition of the NEORSD board (rotating members of member municipalities; permanent seat for Cleveland), the group had a better understanding, but was still skeptical about the ability to influence the NEORSD. There was a feeling of resignation among some that the NEORSD can charge whatever it wants in fees and that ratepayers have no say or control.

3.c. One participant notices a lot of street water along Euclid and E. 66<sup>th</sup> – E. 69<sup>th</sup> during heavy rainstorms, and wondered if this could be fixed by the city or by NEORS D.

3.d. One participant in Parma had very good experience with NEORS D coming out to fix a line problem (Parma has asked NEORS D to take over maintenance of local sewer lines, according to this participant.)

*4. Sewer rates have begun to increase, and will rise a projected (get percentage and rate) over the next (# years) in order to pay for a new system to store untreated water during storms that can then be treated before being returned to Lake Erie (get cost and timeline of project). Do you think the rate increases are reasonable for the size of the project?*

4.a. The costs are only reasonable if the money is spent effectively and that the project really does reduce sewage overflow into Lake Erie.

4.b. Rising fees are a big burden on people with fixed incomes.

4.c. Why wasn't this done years ago? It sounds like the project was pushed back and is now more expensive. Why should we be the ones who have to pay?

4.d. Older pipes are a big reason for rate increases. The older parts of the system need to be maintained and repaired, and it costs more.

4.e. Some participants asked about usage and population decline, wondering if rate increases are tied to having fewer customers. It was explained that the combination of higher maintenance costs for an older system with a stagnant population growth (no real gain; people moving from city and inner ring suburbs to outer suburbs), and less water usage are all contributing to water rate increases. The distinction between these factors and 'Project Clean Lake' was made, and that the sewer rate increases are primarily to pay for Project Clean Lake.

4.f. Residents should pay the cost of cleaning the lake, and not rely on the federal government. It's a local need and should be handled locally.

4.g. Sources of nitrogen runoff such as farms should have to pay part of the cost for stormwater runoff abatement.

4.h. Could sewer fees be 'bundled' with other utility rates for a cheaper overall cost? Not just with water bill, but with other utilities such as trash removal.

*5. What do you think are the most effective ways to communicate with the public about sewer rate increases needed to pay for the untreated water storage system?*

5.a. Provide periodic reports about how funds are being spent and progress being made in completing projects related to the CSO program and stormwater management program. Annual reports could be included with bills and posted on the NEORSD website. Seeking news coverage of progress and specific benchmarks would help the public understand what is being done and what it costs.

5.b. Use media such as Facebook and Sun News to get information out to the public about the NEORSD.

5.c. One participant asked about the comparable percentages of sewer water and stormwater going through the treatment system. A few asked about why overflow tunnels are being built rather than expanding the treatment plant capacity.

5.d. Have periodic public service announcements about the NEORSD project and its progress.

5.e. Mailers and bill inserts are not effective; many participants said they do not read these and often throw them away. Several said they do not have time to read this material.

5.f. Some mentioned that they are aware of water and its value, but don't think about sewer. Water from the tap is usable and something to think about; flushing and draining is automatic and not something people think about.

5.g. There is a wide range of perceptions about how much rates are increasing. The NEORSD needs to communicate rate increases clearly, and make the distinction for ratepayers between rate increases and higher fees due to increased usage.

5.h. Some participants said that if the federal government is mandating changes regarding cleaning sewer overflow and stormwater, then the federal government should subsidize the cost and not make ratepayers pick up the whole cost.

5.i. One participant suggested taxing wind turbines being built in Lake Erie to help pay for the cost of Project Clean Lake and stormwater abatement (or, have some of the revenue from the electricity generation be used to pay these costs.)

5.j. NEORSD needs a 'public face,' a well-known individual who can serve as a spokesperson. This person could do public service ads, appear at events, and help to promote the NEORSD.

*6. What would be the best ways for the Sewer District to provide information about beach and water quality to the public?*

6.a. Sponsor beach water quality reports on local TV and radio news broadcasts.

6.b. Post information on a variety of websites, including news sources such as Cleveland.com, public radio and TV and commercial stations. Also post information on municipal websites, particularly the City of Cleveland. Also websites for school districts, the Metroparks, and Cuyahoga County agencies such as the Health Department.

6.c. Create a phone number with a recorded message about beach quality, similar to numbers used for time and weather.

6.d. Create a smartphone app. that can be downloaded and provides beach quality information and periodic updates on other NEORSD activities, billing information, etc.

*7. The NEORSD is starting a stormwater abatement program that will charge an average fee of \$5/month to household customers based on the square footage of hard surfaces on their property. The funds will be used for developing programs to reduce stormwater runoff in the region served by the NEORSD, and also act as a small incentive to encourage property owners to find ways to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff from their property. What are your thoughts about this initiative?*

7.a. Any increase, even \$5/month, is going to be hard for some people to pay.

7.b. Some municipalities like North Royalton already have a stormwater abatement program. How is this different? Now we have to pay two places for the same service? (from a participant who served on the stormwater abatement task force for North Royalton.)

7.c. Rain barrels are ok, but a big storm will fill and overflow the barrels. Is it worth the cost of the barrels to get a discount?

7.d. Cities will not let homeowners disconnect downspouts from storm drains. Will these regulations get coordinated with what NEORSD is doing?

7.e. Cities built roads and storm drains that now are not adequate. It's a big burden for homeowners to have to pay to adapt to new standards.

7.f. Some don't believe the rates will level off at \$5/month, but think these will keep going up. Again, deep skepticism about rising fees of any kind.

7.g. What about snow run-off? Rain barrels are good in spring through fall, but do not work for snow runoff.

7.h. There were several discussions about individuals' properties and the degree of run-off they may have from driveways and roofs. Many asked if there was a process to contact NEORSD and have their property checked for runoff abatement.

7.i. Several in the business groups were very concerned about the rates and their effect on property owners with large roofs and parking lots. Are discounts available? How will these rates compare to abatement costs? Some said the increased costs would simply be passed on to customers. There was a sense of resignation among a few business people regarding the fees; they cannot control rate increases, and will simply pay and pass on the costs.

*8. The NEORS D wants to help customers get a better understanding of their work. What suggestions do you have for helping people learn more about the NEORS D? For instance, would you notice the NEORS D logo as a sponsor of local weather broadcasts?*

8.a. Work with realtors to help them educate home buyers and sellers about sewer rates and why these are increasing. Two focus group members are realtors and said that utility costs are much more important to home buyers now than ever before, including water and sewer rates.

8.b. Distribute and post information in local community gathering places such as senior centers, recreation centers, the YMCA/YWCA, city halls.

8.c. Post information and distribute flyers about NEORS D and the impact of its work on public health in medical offices. People are typically sitting in waiting rooms and looking for reading material, particularly parents bringing children for doctors' visits. Flyers and brochures about NEORS D programs and what rates are paying for will likely be seen and possibly read by people in doctors' offices. Medical offices should also be interested in helping to distribute information related to public health, particularly concerning the quality of drinking water and beaches.

8.d. The NEORS D often sets up displays at community events like ethnic festivals. It should sponsor more of its own public events to help educate the community about their work (like the treatment plant tours.)

8.e. Local councilmen and mayors should have regular meetings with NEORS D officials to keep updated on what the NEORS D is doing so that they can inform their constituents. Block watch clubs, ward clubs, and other types of neighborhood associations are good vehicles for this kind of community awareness.

*9. Do you think Lake Erie and regional waterways (e.g., Cuyahoga River, Rocky River) are important to the economy of NE Ohio? Why or why not?*

9.a. With the loss of industry, the lakefront is a valuable resource for economic development; housing, recreation, quality of life, which are all important to attracting and retaining professional talent in growing areas such as technology, medicine, finance.

9.b. The lake and rivers are a great source of tourism, along with the Metroparks. These need to be maintained well as attractions for tourists.

9.c. Perceptions about the cleanliness of the lake are mixed. A few participants said their kids like to go to the beach (Huntington, Edgewater), but will not go in the water because they think it is dirty and could make them sick.

9.d. The lakefront is under-utilized; it needs development to maximize its economic potential.

9.e. There doesn't seem to be much available on the lakefront. One participant tried going to the E.55<sup>th</sup> St. area of the lake to walk, but said there was not much there.

9.f. Working downtown, sometimes the lake smells. That would also be good to clean up.

*10. Do you attend public meetings? How often, at which entities (e.g., school board, city council, public agency), and why?*

10.a. One participant went to city council and RTA meetings to get an RTA line moved from their street in Brooklyn (and succeeded.)

10.b. A participant attended meetings in North Royalton with FEMA about area flooding. The city and FEMA were very responsive and fixed infrastructure problems to prevent future flooding.

10.c. One participant in the travel industry attended several meetings in Cleveland about plans for tourist attractions such as the aquarium. She also attended several Parma city council meetings.

10.d. One participant attended Cleveland City Council meetings because her house was targeted to be torn down to build a school (it did not happen).

## Section 4.B: Aggregate focus group phrase analysis

Table 4.2: Stormwater management

Region/type	Stormwater	Stormwater program	Summer Sprinkler Program	Rain Barrels, gutters	Rain water, run-off	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	6	0	0	10	5	21 (24%)
West household	0	6	0	3	0	9 (10%)
South household	1	4	4	2	1	12 (14%)
East household	1	3	5	4	4	17 (20%)
Cleve. business	2	2	0	0	1	5 (6%)
West business	2	4	0	0	2	8 (9%)
South business	2	1	2	2	5	12 (14%)
East business	0	1	0	1	0	2 (3%)
Category response totals	14 (16%)	21 (24%)	11 (13%)	22 (26%)	18 (21%)	86

Stormwater management was of strong interest to the Cleveland (21) and East (17) household groups. Both South household and business groups had 12 responses to these issues, followed by the West household (9) and West business (8). This was not a major issue for Cleveland business group (5) and the East business group (2).

Table 4.3: Functional priorities

Region/ type	Flooding	Keeping the lake clean	Water & water quality	Waterways economically important	Region/type totals
Cleveland Household	3	8	3	0	14 (18%)
West household	2	9	7	8	26 (34%)
South household	0	1	3	1	5 (6%)
East household	1	3	5	0	9 (12%)
Cleveland business	1	0	1	2	4 (5%)
West business	2	2	1	5	10 (13%)
South business	0	3	1	1	5 (6%)
East business	0	2	1	1	4 (5%)
Category response totals	9 (12%)	28 (36%)	22 (29%)	18 (23%)	77

The West household group was the most outspoken about the importance of maintaining a clean lake and waterways (26), followed by Cleveland households (14). As with the survey data, keeping the lake clean was the highest priority in terms of frequency of discussion (28) of any issue. Keeping drinking water sources clean (22) was also important, followed by recognition of the economic importance of the waterways (18). While not the highest frequency response, in combination with the other categories it is clear that keeping Lake Erie clean is a very high priority for members of the focus groups.

Table 4.4: Billing Issues

Region/type	Bill increase	Billing-frequency	Billing-who is responsible	Meter reading	Costs	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	12	1	6	0	4	23 (14%)
West household	13	6	5	0	0	24 (14%)
South household	10	6	3	1	4	24 (14%)
East household	9	5	5	2	10	31 (18%)
Cleveland business	8	2	2	0	2	14 (8%)
West business	5	2	2	1	4	14 (8%)
South business	15	7	6	1	0	29 (17%)
East business	1	4	5	0	1	11 (6%)
Category response totals	73 (43%)	33 (19%)	34 (20%)	5 (3%)	25 (15%)	170

Billing issues dominated some of the focus groups as a subject of discussion, and was the highest frequency topic of any in the groups (170). These issues were of highest concern to the East household group (31) and the South business group (29), followed by South, West, and Cleveland household groups (24, 24, 23). Discussions included concerns about increasing rates, problems with billing, and access to the Cleveland Water Department customer service. The NEORSD Customer Service Center was only accessed by a few of the focus group members.

Table 4.5: Infrastructure

Region/type	Property and billing	infrastructure needs	new meter	Pipes	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	1	2	0	5	8 (15%)
West household	3	2	1	0	6 (11%)
South household	3	2	0	0	5 (9%)
East household	5	0	0	3	8 (15%)
Cleveland business	11	2	2	0	15 (27%)
West business	4	2	1	0	7 (13%)
South business	1	1	3	0	5 (9%)
East business	1	0	0	0	1 (1%)
Category response totals	29 (53%)	11 (20%)	7 (13%)	8 (14%)	55

There was a range of mentions of infrastructure, which was not a specific topic of the focus group questions, except as it related to sewer and water service costs and billing, which was the most frequent category, with 53% of the responses. Infrastructure needs, the new water metering system, and sewer system pipes were also discussed, with water metering again being discussed in the context of billing, while pipes and infrastructure were discussed in relation to system needs and the 20 year plan to reduce CSO discharges into Lake Erie.

Table 4.6: Agencies

Region/type	Division of Water	EPA	federal government	municipal government	NEORS	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	5	0	7	10	7	29 (24%)
West household	1	0	0	8	1	10 (8%)
South household	4	7	2	9	0	22 (18%)
East household	1	1	1	17	3	23 (19%)
Cleveland business	3	1	0	2	4	10 (8%)
West business	2	0	0	4	5	11 (9%)
South business	0	2	2	6	0	10 (8%)
East business	0	2	0	0	3	5 (6%)
Category response totals	16 (13%)	13 (11%)	12 (10%)	56 (47%)	23 (19%)	120

Of the agencies discussed in Table 4.6, municipal governments had the most frequent mentions at 47% of the total (56), followed by the NEORS with 19% (23). This was primarily due to municipal government included the City of Cleveland Water department and other municipalities being the primary billing agent for the NEORS. Municipalities were also mentioned frequently in discussions about stormwater management. This was a topic in discussions about disconnecting home and garage gutter systems from storm drains and redirecting water runoff into rain barrels and onto property. Some homeowners were concerned about restrictions on this practice by local municipalities, which creates conflict between stormwater management goals of the NEORS and local health regulations concerning standing water.

Table 4.7: Suggestions for public outreach

Region/type	Billing inserts	Education	Media	NEORS D publicity ideas	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	1	0	4	27	32 (24%)
West household	0	2	1	23	26 (20%)
South household	0	1	8	9	18 (14%)
East household	1	0	0	0	1 (<1%)
Cleveland business	1	1	0	10	12 (9%)
West business	1	3	3	10	17 (13%)
South business	2	2	4	4	12 (9%)
East business	1	0	2	11	14 (11%)
Category response totals	7 (5%)	9 (7%)	22 (17%)	94 (71%)	132

Table 4.8: Discussions about NEORSD

Region/type	questions about NEORSD	NEORSD accountability	NEORSD call center	NEORSD effectiveness	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	10	9	1	3	23 (22%)
West household	1	2	7	4	14 (13%)
South household	6	3	1	1	11 (10%)
East household	15	5	1	0	21 (20%)
Cleveland business	4	0	5	3	12 (11%)
West business	4	5	2	2	13 (12%)
South business	0	0	5	1	6 (6%)
East business	1	2	1	1	5 (6%)
Category response totals	41 (39%)	26 (25%)	23 (22%)	15 (14%)	105

There was a very good discussion in the focus groups about ideas for public outreach by the NEORSD. Detailed ideas are discussed in Section 4.B. Ways to promote the work of the NEORSD constituted 71% of the responses (94), followed by ideas about use of media (17%). There was some discussion about educational outreach to children, primarily in terms of the importance of educating the next generation about the work of the NEORSD and its role in helping to keep Lake Erie and area waterways clean. Separate billing or billing inserts were mentioned seven times as a technique.

Discussions directly about the NEORSD constituted 14% of the topics discussed in the focus groups (105). Table 4.8 shows that specific questions about the work of the NEORSD, in particular about the reasons for rising rates and the stormwater runoff program were the most frequent source of discussion, mentioned in 39% of the instances that the NEORSD was discussed. Accountability of the NEORSD for rising rates and what was being accomplished, primarily through the importance of being transparent with information, was also an important area for focus group discussion, mentioned 26 times (25%). As expected, the NEORSD Customer Service Center was a frequent topic, given that this was a specific question asked of the focus groups, and discussed 23 times (22%). There was somewhat less discussion of the effectiveness of the NEORSD (14%). It appears that most participants thought the NEORSD is effective in its work treating sewer discharges, and that concerns are primarily related to questions about rising fees.

Table 4.9: Attend public meetings?

Region/type	attend public meeting	Attend public meeting-reason	Region/type totals
Cleveland household	2	1	3 (11.5%)
West household	3	3	6 (23%)
South household	3	0	3 (11.5%)
East household	1	1	2 (8%)
Cleveland business	0	0	0
West business	0	0	0
South business	4	3	7 (27%)
East business	3	2	5 (19%)
Category response totals	16 (62%)	10 (38%)	26

Attendance at public meetings was a short question asked at the end of each focus group session. Table 4.9 shows the responses, primarily concerning how many participants said they had participated in a public meeting and the reasons why. The South region household and business groups had the highest level of participation, followed by the West households and East businesses. The Cleveland and West business groups did not have anyone who had participated in a public meeting.

Table 4.10: Total responses for each category

Region/type	Stormwater mgmt.	Functional priorities	Billing issues	Infrastructure	Agencies	Suggestions for public outreach	NEORS D	Public meeting attendance	Total
Cleveland household (13)	21	14	23	8	29	32	23	3	153 20%
West household (15)	9	26	24	6	10	26	14	6	121 16%
South household (14)	12	5	24	5	22	18	11	3	100 13%
East household (14)	17	9	31	8	23	1	21	2	112 14%
Cleveland business (7)	5	4	14	15	10	12	12	0	72 9%
West business (9)	8	10	14	7	11	17	13	0	80 10%
South business (7)	12	5	29	5	10	12	6	7	86 11%
East business (5)	2	4	11	1	5	14	5	5	47 6%
Totals (84)	86 11%	77 10%	170 22%	55 7%	120 16%	132 17%	105 14%	26 3%	771

The total sets of responses shown in Table 4.10 vary widely, largely due to the type of question asked and the relevant interest of the focus groups in the topic. The most frequently discussed topics were billing issues (170), suggestions for public outreach (132), and public agencies involved in water and sewer services (120). The NEORS D as a separate topic of discussion was mentioned 105 times across the focus groups. Stormwater-related issues were mentioned 86 times, followed by functional priorities such as cleanliness of the lake and rivers, which were mentioned 77 times. The focus groups periodically discussed infrastructure such as sewer pipes, treatment plants, and streets (55). Focus groups were asked if they had ever attended a public meeting, and if so, why. This got the fewest mentions (26), primarily because only a few of the members of each focus group had ever attended a public meeting (with the exception of the South households group, where 80% of the participants had attended at least one public meeting.)

There are no clear patterns across the focus groups regarding frequency of topical discussion. The widest range of topical frequency was ‘suggestions for public outreach,’ which ranged from one mention by the East household group to 32 mentions by the Cleveland household group. ‘Public meetings’ and ‘infrastructure’ had the narrowest ranges of frequency, with ‘public meetings’ ranging from 0 – 7, and ‘infrastructure’ ranging from 1 – 15. The Cleveland household group had the highest frequency of separate responses to questions (153), followed by the West (121) and East (112), and South (100) household groups. The business groups were about half the size of the household groups, and so not surprisingly had fewer aggregate responses than the household groups. The South business group led with 86 responses, followed by the West business with 80 and the Cleveland business group with 72 responses. The smallest group (East region) had the fewest responses (47).

## Part II, Section 5: Elected Official Interviews

The BW Community Research Institute included interviews of elected public officials in its proposal for the NEORSD Customer Satisfaction/Awareness project. Due to factors such as communities still involved in litigation with the NEORSD, the research for this part of the report is still underway. An addendum to the report will be submitted with the results of the remaining twelve interviews being conducted in November. Interviews were completed with the following elected officials:

Robert Blomquist, Mayor, Olmsted Falls (in person, Tom Sutton, 8/27/12)

Brian Day, Councilman, Parma (in person, Kim Novak-Sczcepinski, 8/29/12)

Danita Love, President, Village Council, Highland Hills (phone, Tom Sutton, 8/27/12)

Brad Sellers, Mayor, Warrensville Heights (phone, Kim Novak-Sczcepinski, 8/23/12)

Data from the four interviews is presented under the questions asked in each interview.

### **1. Please tell me your perceptions of the work of the NEORSD. Do you think your constituents are getting high quality and efficient service? Why or why not?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

The work of the NEORSD is critical to the region and to his community. He has been on a tour of the Southerly treatment plant, and thought it was up to date in its technology and operations. He thinks it would help for the public to see the treatment plants and get an idea about how expensive these systems are to operate. Mayor Blomquist thinks the public is largely in the dark about Project Clean Lake. Some information gets out about the Mill Creek project, but the media coverage is partial at best.

Olmsted Falls used to have separate billing for water and sewer, but now it is combined. In addition to the increases in rates from NEORSD, there are also increases in Cleveland Water rates and fees added by Olmsted Falls for installation and maintenance of sewer lines. This adds up to higher bills that are dramatically increased on a quarterly basis.

*Councilman Day:*

Councilman Day believes that NEORSD keeps Parma City Council well informed for a couple of reasons. The Parma Mayor is on the Board of Trustees at NEORSD. As a result it puts Parma in a unique situation with our Mayor being well informed of what is happening with NEORSD. The Mayor keeps City Council well informed and as a result we can keep our residents informed. Secondly, we have had representatives from NEORSD at city council meetings and this gives us and our residents the opportunity to address any questions or concerns. Consequently, our good

relationship with NEORSD and understanding of what our residents expect results in residents receiving good quality services from NEORSD.

*Councilwoman Love:*

Constituents are predominantly senior citizens; overall the NEORSD is doing a good job with customer service. Problems that arise are addressed; things seem to be relatively ok. There are no complaints as far as Councilwoman Love can tell. NEORSD services are good; there have been no issues with sanitary sewers.

*Mayor Sellers:*

“I think that they (NEORSD) are invisible.” No one knows who they are. They do not have representatives here, visible, the way that other utility companies such as Dominion and AT&T are. They have not built their brand here. Now they want people to pay higher fees for services yet we do not see them or what they do here. I know what they “claim” they do. But we don’t see it. We don’t know if they are doing what they say they are doing.

I do not feel that the people of Warrensville Heights are getting a high quality product. In all honesty, I think it could be better. As for service, we do not have a face. We need a face that we know we can call if there are problems.

## **2. What role do you think the NEORSD plays in keeping Lake Erie and local waterways clean?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

The NEORSD plays the role of treating wastewater, but it is not the only actor in the region. There are neighboring sewer districts such as Lorain County and North Olmsted that also treat wastewater. There is a big problem with stormwater runoff, particularly coming from farming areas south of his community. He believes that the NEORSD has not taken a regional approach to these issues. There is no coordination of services among the different treatment authorities, or planning for coordinated management of stormwater runoff.

*Councilman Day:*

NEORSD plays a very critical role in keeping Lake Erie and local waterways clean. This is evident with Project Clean Lake. This program will result in a significant decrease in the volume of raw sewage discharge.

*Councilwoman Love:*

NEORSD is responsible for wastewater treatment. Councilwoman Love is the president of the Northeast Ohio City Councils Association, and has participated in several community forums about wastewater treatment and tours of NEORSD facilities and treatment plants. She believes the NEORSD staff are knowledgeable and do well in explaining their services to the public.

*Mayor Sellers:*

I know what they (the NEORS) are supposed to do. Yet I have three creeks that aren't getting cleaned and need to be cleaned out. There are branches and all kinds of stuff. I am going to be in there cleaning out what the NEORS is supposed to be cleaning.

### **3. Why do you think NEORS is raising rates for sewer service?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

Rates are increasing to pay for Project Clean Lake and the stormwater management program. Cleveland is getting a better deal because of the rates it pays, and the special exceptions it gets. The suburbs struggle because there is no unity among their elected officials, so Cleveland gets the best arrangements as the largest municipality served by the NEORS.

*Councilman Day:*

For a couple of programs; one is Project Clean Lake and the other is a new Stormwater Management Program.

*Councilwoman Love:*

The councilwoman believes that rates are increasing in order to improve wastewater treatment and sewer lines. This was explained by the NEORS at various community forums. As president of the Northeast Ohio City Council Association (NEOCCA), Councilwoman Love said their membership understands that wastewater and stormwater treatment and management are regional issues. Council members from communities opposed to the NEORS rate increases are still active in the NEOCCA, and speak out about their concerns.

*Mayor Sellers:*

Someone has to pay for their big machine. They have a lot of overhead. Now that the feds have mandated these regulations instead of tightening their belts and figuring out what the real cost is, they are just going to pass it on to the people. There's no accountability, visibility or transparency. But now they are going to be scrutinized.

My question is, "Is everyone paying for this equally? Or are certain ones paying more because others can't afford it?" And what happens when people can't afford to pay?

**4. What do you know about the Regional Stormwater Management Program? How do you think it will affect the residents of your community?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

Stormwater management is not coordinated in his part of the region. The multiple contiguous authorities (Lorain County, Medina County, North Olmsted, NEORSD) make it difficult to coordinate planning. However, there needs to be a regional response, particularly concerning agricultural runoff. Homeowners are paying high fees for conversions from septic to sewer lines. Stormwater runoff continues to be a problem coming from agricultural land to the south. Lorain County and North Olmsted have a competitive advantage because of not charging higher fees on impervious surfaces. As a result, these communities are more likely to attract new commercial development. Olmsted Falls and other nearby communities served by the NEORSD are at a competitive disadvantage.

*Councilman Day:*

If I recall correctly, I believe that is on the average a \$57 fee to property owners to fund the new Stormwater Management Program. While there hasn't been an issue with flooding in Parma this year, last year with the record rain fall we had our share of flooded basements. It is certainly my hope that the program will help communities deal better with stormwater volume and as a result alleviate issues with flooded basements.

*Councilwoman Love:*

Councilwoman Love was not aware of the NEORSD regional Stormwater Management Program. She welcomes getting information about the program to distribute to her constituents.

*Mayor Sellers:*

All I have to say is, "Let's get to it!" I am tired of all the talk. I want to see some action. It needs to be done.

How it affects the residents is yet to be seen. If they do everything they say they are going to do, it will be good. If they don't, I am going to be down there pounding on someone's door because I am going to have a lot of angry residents.

**5. Have you heard or seen community awareness initiatives conducted by the NEORSD? What do you think could be done to help your community develop a better understanding of what NEORSD does?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

He has used NEORSD outreach materials at community meetings. There was an NEORSD rain barrel demonstration at a recent Garden Club plant sale.

*Councilman Day:*

As I had mentioned, we have had representatives from NEORSD at our city council meetings and they did hold a town hall meeting in Parma to talk about these projects and programs. Again, with our Mayor being on the Board at NEORSD it does put us in a unique situation. It is possible that other communities may not have as good of an understanding as we do. I think it would certainly be a good idea for NEORSD to keep conducting town hall meetings in communities to keep residents informed. City government needs to continue to do their part by keeping residents informed through things like city newsletters and council newsletters.

*Councilwoman Love:*

The councilwoman has conducted public meetings and programs with residents about a variety of issues, including sewer system issues such as rising rates. She said that residents often do not pay attention to literature, and that public meetings are more effective as a means of communication. She had several suggestions for communication strategies, including tying in with the Green City, Blue Lake emails; issuing a wastewater management newsletter; using magazine ads and public service announcements on television and radio, and advertising in the *City and Village* magazine.

*Mayor Sellers:*

They (NEORSD) came out about eighteen (18) months ago. That was it. Like I said, I do not even know who the NEORSD rep is. As far as “Keeping Our Great Lake Great” and “PUP”...”never heard of them”.

Coming out here once every eighteen or so months is not going to cut it. If you held a meeting here, there might only be fifty or so people. We have a quarterly newsletter that is very detailed and informative. Someone needs to tailor it for the residents of Warrensville Heights. Don't be talking in generalities. Tell them specifically what this means to them and how it will specifically affect Warrensville Heights. Then you might have something. People read the newsletter and know that what is included is important.

## **6. Any other suggestions or comments?**

*Mayor Blomquist:*

Mostly focused on the need to be equitable in how the Credit Manual is written regarding eligibility for discounts in the stormwater management program.

*Councilman Day:*

I would just add that I know these increases in fees and charges are coming at a very difficult economic time for many residents. The record rain fall of 2011 made a big impression on me that something more needed to be done to deal with stormwater and flooding. Flooded basements are without a doubt one of the worst things a resident would have to experience. I've toured many of these homes last year and my heart truly went out to these folks, it's a terrible experience. I believe the steps that NEORSD is taking will assist us in these flooding issues. It certainly won't happen overnight, but I believe we are headed in the right direction.

*Councilwoman Love:*

The councilwoman thinks the NEORSD is doing a good job in its work with wastewater management and treatment; better than other cities around the country.

*Mayor Sellers:*

Find me a face. Someone I can call at the NEORSD. And "Let's make it happen."

## Part II, Section 6: Phone interviews with staff of other sewer authorities

The BW Community Research Institute proposed conducting telephone interviews with marketing, communications, and government relations staff of sewer authorities across the U.S. that were addressing combined sewer overflow (CSO) issues, to determine how these authorities were handling public awareness and civic education about their work. The authorities were jointly selected by CRI and NEORS staff, based on the authority addressing CSO issues in the Great Lakes region, or being an authority with a positive reputation in the sewer authority field for community outreach and/or handling CSO issues.

Interviews were conducted with the staff of eight sewer authorities, including the three that were also targeted for household customer phone surveys (Buffalo, New York; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). The other sewer authorities chosen were Central Contra Costa, California; Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina; District of Columbia; Louisville, Kentucky, and Rochester, New York. Staff identified for the interviews were those who addressed community relations, communications, and government relations. Each staff person reached was asked the following questions (some variance occurs in which questions are asked of which staff, depending on how responsibilities are divided in a particular sewer authority):

1. What kinds of public outreach, education programs do you conduct? Types, how often, how many people attend events?
2. Do you conduct media public awareness efforts? What messaging do you use? What types of media?
3. Are your sewer/water rates increasing because of EPA mandated improvements? If so, are you conducting a public awareness campaign to explain the increase to your customers? (if so, get details.)
4. Do you think your customers understand your agency and its function? Would you like to see improvements in customer awareness?
5. Explain your work with public/elected officials.
6. How would you evaluate relations between your sewer district and local public officials?
7. Has your district had any legal challenges to rate increases and/or new projects by citizens and/or communities served by your district?
8. How have public officials handled stormwater management in your area? What is the relationship of local municipalities with the sewer district related to stormwater management?
9. How many calls do you get annually? What types of calls are typical?
10. Have you conducted any customer satisfaction surveys? If so, results?

11. How would you rate your Customer Service Center? What are your best features? What are areas for improvement?

12. Have changes in sewer and/or water rates been a reason for customer calls? About how many/percentage?

13. What is your annual external communications budget?

Sewer Authority staff interview list:

(sewer authority demographic data drawn from 2010 U.S. Census and sewer authority websites)

*Buffalo (NY) Sewer Authority*

Number of customers: 112, 844 households; 261,025 population

Number of communities served: City of Buffalo

Geographic area: 40.38 square miles

Political authority: Mayor, City of Buffalo

Scott Steinwald

Intergovernmental Coordinator

716-851-4664

September 26, 2012

*Central Contra Costa (CA) Sanitary District*

Number of customers: 462,000 residents

Number of communities served: Martinez and surrounding communities of Central Contra Costa County

Geographic area: 146 square miles

Political authority: special district (one of 43 in Contra Costa County); self-governing board

Michael Scahill

Communication Services Manager & Customer Service

925-229-7310

September 10, 2012

*Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC (Char-Meck)*

Number of customers: 350,392 households; 944,373 residents

Number of communities served: Charlotte and surrounding Mecklenburg County, which includes six cities separate from Charlotte

Geographic area: 523.84 square miles

Political authority: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utility Department, City of Charlotte

Jennifer Smith  
Government Affairs Director  
704-336-7924  
September 12, 2012

Jennifer Frost  
Public Manager  
704-432-0970  
September 13, 2012

Carlton Viar  
WorkForce Manager  
704-432-4008  
September 18, 2012

Kim Eagle  
Deputy Director  
704-336-3700  
September 19, 2012

*DC Water & Sewer Authority*

Number of customers: 257,317 households; 617,996 residents

Number of communities served: District of Columbia

Geographic area: 61.05 square miles

Political authority: Mayor, District of Columbia

Emmanuel Briggs  
Manager Community Outreach  
202-787-2003  
September 10, 2012

Will Pickering  
202-787-2081  
Government Affairs Director  
September 11, 2012

Lauren Preston  
Director of Customer Service  
202-787-2000  
September 12, 2012

*Metropolitan Sewer District Louisville, Kentucky*

Number of customers: 239,592 households; 602,011 residents

Number of communities served: most of Jefferson County, including Louisville

Geographic area: 325.25 square miles

Political authority: 8 member board appointed by Louisville Metro. Mayor

Lanita Grimes

Customer Service Manager

502-587-0603

September 11, 2012

Steve Tedder

Community Affairs

502-540-6591

September 12, 2012

*Milwaukee (WI) Metropolitan Sewerage District*

Number of customers: 379,372 households; 952,532 residents

Number of communities served: 28, including Milwaukee (most of Milwaukee County)

Geographic area: 241.40 square miles

Political authority: special district with 11 member commission: 7 appointed by mayor of Milwaukee; 4 appointed by council of suburban governments

Bill Graffin

Communications Director

414-272-5100

September 10, 2012

Cora Lee-Palmer

Community Affairs Manager

414-225-2191

September 10, 2012

Steve Jacquart

Government Affairs Director

414-272-5100

September 10, 2012

*Philadelphia Water Department*

Number of customers: 574,488 households; 1,536,471 residents

Number of communities served: City of Philadelphia/Philadelphia County

Geographic area: 134.1 square miles

Political authority: Mayor, City of Philadelphia

Bob DePiano  
Customer Service Manager  
215-686-6902  
September 12, 2012

*Rochester Pure Waters Coalition*

Number of customers: 291,195 households; 745,625 residents

Number of communities served: Rochester and most of Monroe County, NY

Geographic area: 657.21 square miles

Political authority: Monroe County government

Bill Putt  
Field Manager  
585-753-7600  
August 22, 2012

## **Section 6.A: Community awareness efforts**

(questions 1, 2, 3)

### *Buffalo, NY:*

The Buffalo Sewer Authority (BSA) is developing a long term public outreach program. The general manager of the BSA is conducting a series of public meetings which have had approximately 100 in attendance at each session. The BSA has no paid media, other than paying for advertising job openings. They do not use social media. Public messages are communicated through press releases coordinated with the mayor's office and through grassroots organizations.

### *Central Contra Costa, CA:*

The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District (CCCSD) has a twelve page full cover newsletter that goes out to 130,000 households three times a year. They educate people about pollution prevention and Pharmaceutical Drop-Off Facilities. 'The newsletter really lets everyone know what is going on,' according to Community Relations Manager Michael Scahill.

There are a variety of educational programs conducted by the CCCSD. They conducted programs such as Sewer Science, which involves approximately 2,000 students/year. Water Wizards is a 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade program. The CCCSD is a major supporter of the Delta Discovery Program. Delta Discovery is a marine science program for 5<sup>th</sup> graders and involves approximately 5,000 students/year. The program is a 3.5 hour excursion on the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta where students learn about the source of their drinking water and the importance of pollution prevention.

The CCCSD holds special events and issues press releases about its activities. The CCCSC mission statement is "Protecting Public Health and the Environment."

When the CCCSC increased rates, they received about 200 calls or emails from a service area of 120,000 households and 10,000 businesses. Of those calls/emails, the majority were from wealthy communities.

The CCCSD has a very good sewer spill record. The new challenge is to increase nitrogen removal. This is the result of new regulations from state government in Sacramento. This will be a feature of the next newsletter; again, a very effective means of communication for CCCSD customers.

According to Scahill, 'People tend to "Flush and Forget". As long as everything is working, they don't worry about it. But that's why we do tours for school and groups so they can really see what goes on.'

*Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC:*

The Water & Sewer Authority is a city department that serves all of Mecklenburg County, and is one of thirteen city departments. Stormwater is a separate city department. Both are part of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities (CMU), which is under the governance of the Charlotte City Manager and City Council.

CMU uses brochures, websites, student education, adult education, public events, and media campaigns to inform the public about their work and distribute public messaging. The CMU is also developing a smartphone app for information dissemination to customers.

Student and adult education are usually mini-campaigns based on the season. The CMU conducts pollution prevention programs regularly, but fall/spring is usually Scoop the Poop. Educational kits are sent out to teachers after a minimum number of presentation dates are scheduled (usually about a dozen.) The CMU does not have the staff to accommodate all educational presentation requests.

The CMU has volunteer Water Watchers, a program that encourages people to call 311 to report pollution and any illegal dumping. In the fall and spring they also conduct ‘Clean Streams/Green Lawns,’ for people cleaning up their yards.

‘Grease Free’ is another seasonal educational/public awareness program conducted by CMU. It focuses on all of the holiday baking and getting people to properly dispose of cooking grease. CMU partners with the local utility company, with the common goal of preventing grease fires.

Education and public awareness programs of the CMU include the following:

- Scoop the Poop
- Earth Day: public events focused on pollution prevention
- Flood Prevention
- Turn Around Don’t Drown
- Boater education: there are a lot of boaters whom CMU tries to educate about not throwing their litter in the lakes and also to report any spills they might see
- ‘Blue Planet’ events that feature tours of waste treatment plants

The CMU also has a volunteer program. On September 29<sup>th</sup> the CMU conducted Big Sweep. There are seven locations where volunteers come and clean the trash out of the creeks during a four hour time period. Another volunteer program is Creek Release. People come out and help plant trees along the creeks.

Another well-known and liked CMU program is Bark in the Park, a community festival for ‘dogs and the people they own.’ It features activities for families and their pets, including a competition for ‘top dog.’ The 2011 event was attended by over 17,000 people.

The media used by CMU depends on the message or campaign:

- Grease Free: radio and billboard and messaging on CMU vehicles

- Scoop the Poop: television and billboard; people love to SEE the dogs so it has to be visual
- Flood: radio and billboard
- CMU also uses the internet

CMU does have a Facebook presence but it has a completely different name. It's called Water Watchers. CMU found that people do not want to follow anything that has to do with the government. A separately named Facebook page works much better as a way to connect with customers. The page is geared toward volunteers. CMU asks for volunteers and encourages people to report any illegal dumping or other problems. There is also an Adopt a Stream cleanup program. Two CMU staff manage the page.

CMU intentionally does not have a Twitter account. Instead, CMU partners with the local fire department. No one likes government but they LOVE firemen and dogs. CMU feeds tweets to the fire department who are always tweeting and have them send out CMU messaging. CMU does not care who gets the credit; the focus is on getting the message out.

CMU found that other groups do not have the funds they have from Stormwater Management. CMU can use its financial resources to partner with a group of people who are 'more loveable' than CMU and get the message out. It does not matter who gets the credit as long as the message gets out.

CMU and other public agencies used to argue about who was responsible for what. Once the agencies stopped arguing and focused on who could most effectively get the message out, things started coming together.

CMU surveys show that 10% of our customers take action when they get CMU mailers. CMU sends out 240,000 for \$9,000/month. But the 10% die hard readers do take some sort of action.

CMU conducts an annual survey every spring that measures the effects of educational outreach efforts. CMU has asked the same questions for the last ten (10) years. The phrasing of questions may vary, but the content is the same, which provides a good base-line. CMU asks about how customers have heard their messaging. Television is the overwhelming first choice. Surprisingly, the surveys always have people saying they saw CMU messaging on billboards, even when billboards were not used in a particular year. There are also people who say that they heard messaging directly from a news anchor or weatherman when it was a commercial during the news.

The Stormwater education program is 70% of the communications budget. CMU has been doing this for a decade, so there is an institutional 'memory' of the changes and effectiveness of community outreach efforts. CMU may alter the campaign and the logo a bit but the message is the same. When the program started ten years ago, the budget was \$300,000. Now it is \$120,000.

CMU contacts with counterparts in Colorado, Arizona and Florida has found that a Stormwater Program has to be specifically tailored to the region because every region is different. Charlotte-

Mecklenburg gets 45 inches of rain annually. During the summer there are daily torrential downpours that last fifteen (15) minutes.

The total annual budget for community relations is about \$300,000. CMU is maintaining current programs. They are exploring broadening partnerships with city and county agencies and nonprofit groups. For the Scoop the Poop campaign, CMU partners with the local Animal Control agency.

### *District of Columbia:*

The District of Columbia Water and Sewer Authority is a city department that also handles water service and is titled DC Water (DCW). A wide variety of educational and public awareness efforts are conducted to educate the public about their work. They have an effective logo featuring a waterdrop next to 'dc' and the phrase, 'Water is Life.'

Construction outreach: DCW tries to let communities know how construction is going to impact their community by working with public officials and businesses and doing this before the construction starts. Sometimes it is done during the planning and design phase. There is an external coordinator specifically for this function.

Youth outreach: DCW focuses on getting into the schools. Their work reaches 600-1000 students/year. The focus is on trying to get students to think about being the environmental stewards for tomorrow. Youth targeted events include the DC Water Drop Festival, which includes a circle of all of the services that DCW provides. It's important to make it fun. Wendy the Water Drop is the DCW mascot.

DCW holds various events around the communities. They set up tables/booths, a mobile Brita unit where people can fill up their bottles, and have a misting tent. DCW has a good handle on public awareness. DCW operates the largest treatment plant in the world, so it is well known.

DCW is actively using all social media avenues. The staff includes four people in a rotation to post messaging on social media platforms. Every department has someone on call at all times if something happens (e.g., a water line break). If something major happens there is a chain of who is contacted and how that funnels out through the media. DCW tries to get to the person who can tell what happened, how/when it will be fixed and then post it to the public as quickly as possible. Media outreach is conducted daily.

DCW is in the midst of the Clean Rivers Project. The project involves increasing tunnel capacity and is funded through a rate funder fee. It's a fixed rate based on property square footage. DCW maintains 13.1 miles of tunnels that run through the city.

DCW has been doing outreach for the Clean Rivers Project for several years. Power Point public presentations, public meetings, and door hangers are all used in outreach efforts, as well as 'Outreach Advisory Neighborhood Communications.'

People have a good overall understanding of the function of DCW and the Clean Rivers Project. All efforts to educate the public are maximized. Partnerships with stakeholders such as other agencies, community associations, and local businesses have been very helpful.

*Louisville, KY:*

The Louisville Metropolitan Sewer District (LMSD) has been operating under a Consent Decree from the EPA since 2008. It is also tied up in financial controversy related to construction of a sports arena in downtown Louisville, KY that was financed through the bonding authority of the LMSD. There are concerns that losses from the bonds due to use of derivative investment instruments may have to be covered through increased sewer fees. The Community Relations director, Steve Tedder, started in October 2011 after a state audit, changes in the LMSD board and hiring of a new executive director. Educational efforts are largely in response to requirements of the EPA Consent Decree.

LMSD convinced the EPA that the Green Projects initiatives can substitute for a lot of Gray Projects. LMSD educates the community about why these projects are being done and how the community benefits. LMSD partners with other groups and associations and ‘piggy backs’ on what they are doing with public outreach.

In the past, LMSD did a lot of education with kids, but they have not been able to do this since the Consent Decree. LMSD is currently trying to partner with the Water Department because they have a certified education program for K-12.

There were a year’s worth of articles about the LMSD in the *Courier Journal* which is what prompted the state audit. ‘Needless to say we are not on the best of terms’ (Steve Tedder).

The only outside media public awareness conducted by LMSD is Project WIN (Waterway Improvement Now). All educational efforts and logos are connected with Project WIN, which is on LMSD trucks and mailings.

LMSD has three core responsibilities:

- Waste water: in what is considered “Old Louisville” there is a combined service; in what is considered the suburban county it is just sanitary
- Stormwater and drainage
- Flood protection: because of the ’37 flood, LMSD maintains a 29 mile flood wall that keeps the Ohio River out; LMSD maintains the ditches/streams/channels to allow drainage into the river

So people do not have a full understanding because it is a little complicated.

Getting people to understand their bill is a challenge. There are three (3) sections:

- Water usage
- Sewage

- Drainage: which is a flat rate

LMSD does not directly bill customers, which causes misunderstandings.

*Milwaukee, WI:*

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewer District (MMSD) coordinates outreach events with speakers and civil engineers for professional organizations, universities/colleges and schools (middle and high school). It acts as a speaker bureau with topics such as: flood management, water course design, watershed program, green/grey infrastructure. MMSD offers tours of the water treatment plant, which is managed by a private contractor.

School-based educational efforts include introducing students at the third through fifth grade to what is done with waste water. Green infrastructure and sustainability are significant topics for high school level educational outreach.

MMSD conducts public awareness efforts at street, community and church festivals, which have been very successful. These venues give people the opportunity to ask questions about services of the MMSD. One important question is defining the difference between combined sewer and separated sewer.

All education and events are ongoing. When there is a situation that arises (i.e. flash flooding, etc.) that is when it is most important to get back out in the public and re-educate them.

Project Lead the Way is a pre-engineering program promoted by the MMSD.

The Public Information Manager handles anything to do with the media and print. The Community Relations Manager is more involved with educational outreach, but has input on what is released to the media.

In terms of how the public understands the work of the MMSD, it is mixed. Some do and some do not understand what MMSD does. There is a misconception that the MMSD treats drinking water, which it does not. They only treat the waste water. Many misconceptions are also due to combined billing for sewer and water service.

The challenge is getting on people's radar. Unless you are on their radar, they are not going to listen to what you say. MMSD tries to get on their radar through getting into the schools. The biggest benefit has been partnering with the EPA on the Fix a Leak Week Program. We have an essay contest with prizes. Students work with their parents to detect leaks in their homes and we educate them on the cost factor involved in even tiny leaks. MMSD provides them with the leak tablets. Engaging the kids with the parents has been very effective.

There are many public awareness programs conducted by the MMSD, including: household hazardous waste programs, medical collection programs, a toilet rebate program (Kohler is

located there and offered a \$230 toilet for \$75, which conserves more water), Every Drop Counts Campaign, Basement Connection Program, Green Seams, Flood Management.

The Basement Connection Program tries to get people to understand that they have laterals and they do not last forever and it is the homeowner's responsibility to fix and they can be expensive. The communities decide on the cost sharing. An educational website provides useful information about preventing basement sewer backups ([www.basementconnection.org](http://www.basementconnection.org)).

The type of media used by MMSD depends on the campaign. All social media are used, including posting videos on You Tube.

Sewer service improvements were completed in the 1980s and 1990s, which included rate increases. MMSD has spent over \$4 billion on improvements over the past thirty years, including \$3 billion on water pollution abatements and another \$1 billion in 2010. Sewage and stormwater treatment captured 99.7 of flows in 2011; MMSD is currently at 99.99999%.

#### *Philadelphia, PA:*

The Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) handles wastewater management and treatment for the city of Philadelphia, PA. A recent educational initiative was the opening in 2003 of The Fairmount Waterworks Interpretive Center, located underneath the Philadelphia Museum of Art. The website has a lot of information that can be downloaded for education purposes: <http://www.fairmountwaterworks.org/>

PWD conducts education about urban watersheds and water resources. PWD goes out to schools and also conducts adult education. There are public meetings, brochures, public media and social media used to promote PWD information.

Part of the PWD mission is that as rates increase, education needs to be enhanced. PWD needs customers to have a willingness to pay the increased fees as well as have an acceptance of the rates and satisfaction with services. A new program of community education and outreach is 'Green City Clean Waters.'

PWD does not have a budget for any type of media; any media coverage has to be free and not involve paid advertising or promotions. PWD uses civic associations to get messages out. There is a big presence in the neighborhoods through the community development corporations.

PWD also has printed materials available for public meetings. A website is maintained and social media are used for messaging. Most of the media is through PSAs on public television and radio. PWD also has videos. But again, nothing PWD has to pay for.

PWD customers do not have the level of understanding of their function that PWD would like to see. There are large economic groups that do not get it. PWD is trying to get information out to them at a level that they can understand and into those communities.

This is why it is important to get to the school-age children. PWD can start explaining their work, and hopefully in fifteen years when they are customers they will have a better understanding of what PWD does and why. PWD goes to different parts of Philadelphia and conducts presentations and holds Q&A sessions, usually by invitation from local organizations. Educational efforts are emphasized when rate increases are implemented.

*Rochester, NY:*

Rochester sewer services are provided through the Pure Waters Coalition. The Coalition does not employ bill enclosures for communication. The only time this method is used is to communicate a repair or trouble spot to a neighborhood. The major methods of communication were the website, which has a H2O hero link that is an informative and interactive website; and is a presentation of the Water Education Collaborative. This link has resources and interactive pages for children and adults alike, a great resource for educating the public and creating collaboration in resolving issues that affect water quality.

The District finds the most effective means to communicate are door hangars and neighborhood surveys. There are partnerships through the Water Education Coalition with the Museum and Science Center that has school programs to educate Rochester children on the connection of ecosystems and their daily lives. The Seneca Zoo has a program called the Green Backyard project, which includes exhibits and activities to instruct and inform conservation methods in your own backyard, one portion of it is devoted to Stormwater and the process of managing it. The District does not use TV or radio for public awareness efforts. Recent water quality reports were not available.

There are samples of brochures and door hangars available. Overall they seem to be highly regarded and proactive. Their website contains as much information on how the system works, why it is important, and how citizens can be part of the solution as one could hope to find, very educational.

## **Section 6.B. Customer Service**

(questions 4, 9, 10, 11, 12)

*Buffalo, NY:*

BSA has a few methods for customer service: customers can call directly, they can call “311,” and there is the billing process to provide information. BSA is always looking for ways to interact with residents and improve communications and services.

Customer service calls come to us directly or through “311;” these are service-related.

BSA has not conducted customer surveys. “311” has a process that tracks customers who have called and checks back with them. Generally, they are satisfied with how their calls were handled.

The BSA direct customer service department is staffed with 3-4 people (do not know how many staff the separate “311” call center).

BSA’s best feature is the “complaint truck”. There is a crew out in the field that handles work orders and determines their priority. For instance, if there is a back-up in a basement BSA usually gets out to fix the problem the same day. If the call comes towards the end of business hours, the crew responds the next day.

*Central Contra Costa, CA:*

The CCCSD does not get many customer service calls. Instead of a call center, the CCCSD has a Public Information Group consisting of five people focused on how to communicate information to the public about the work of the CCCSD. The Communications Manager handles calls, of which there are about one per day. These are not tracked because it is part of the mission statement. Typical calls are about a smell in the house or neighborhood, or asking about having a presentation done for a class or community event.

CCCSD conducts continuous surveys, particularly in neighborhoods where there has been construction or any type of disruption. Surveys are conducted before, during and after a construction project. On a scale of 1-5, CCCSD has an average score of 4.7+ with satisfaction. CCCSD has a strong positive reputation for good customer service.

The best feature of CCCSD is the responsiveness and the speed of the response. It is standing policy that all calls/emails are responded to in 24 hours. The motto is “How would you like to be treated?” Typically calls are about being available to hear someone’s concerns. For example, CCCSD construction outreach was able to solve a very challenging situation. Someone sued the district because of a situation involving a construction project. By the time the construction outreach person was finished, the disgruntled customer sent him a \$100 gift card at Christmas (which of course they had to return). But he was just so thankful that someone listened to him,

solved the problem and did what they said they were going to do when they said they would do it.

An improvement which is undergoing change and training is getting the people at the front desk to get the caller to the right person so that they are not bounced around. Sometimes they just rattle off information or are not sure who the right person is to take the call and just send them “somewhere.”

There are only a few calls about changes in rates. The CCCSD sends out notifications about rate increase proposals using first class mail and marked ‘Official Notice,’ in accordance with Proposition 218 requirements. The notifications let customers know that there is going to be a public hearing, the date, time and place with a phone number and email address. The last one sent out resulted in less than 200 attendees/calls/emails. It was sent to 120,000 households and 10,000 businesses.

The CCCSD also has in-house printing capabilities, including a printer that can make a million copies and print a book. There is a graphic designer on staff. The newsletter is the only publication not printed in-house.

All new employees must participate in an eight hour customer service training program that covers team building, conflict resolution and listening skills. Employees who have been at CCCSD for longer tenure also have to go through refresher courses.

#### *Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC:*

One of the staff interviewed, Carlton Viar, works as the CharMeck 311 contact center Workforce Manager. He explained that the 311 center gets initial calls related to utilities and stormwater issues. The 311 center gets 600-700 calls each month that concern sewer issues. Most involve questions about rates, usage, and sewer back-ups. Some calls are completed at the 311 center, but many are transferred to the CMUD (Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities Department) for further action.

There is usually an increase in calls when rates increase. Awareness efforts focus on helping people understand the costs of water usage; the 311 center works with the staff of the CMUD in this capacity. Bill inserts and notifications are used for public education, as well as increased community involvement.

#### *District of Columbia:*

DCW gets about 600 calls/day, primarily involving questions about water quality, water, pressure, and taste. A lot of calls occur when there is unexpected service interruption. People in an area affected by planned maintenance are notified of potential service disruptions. Sometimes construction crews will shut off services to people not notified, which happens more often than is

desired, and is the source of a lot of calls. There are not many calls about billing because of having a fully automated meter reading system that does not use bill estimates.

DCW tries to avoid shut offs. DCW serves 130,000 meters, of which 108,000 are residential properties. There is a Process Notification auto-dialer system that calls anyone with a bill over \$75 and/or is more than 60 days past due. DCW sends out 400-2,000 notifications daily. DCW does not shut people off until their bill reaches \$250. The notifications help avoid shut-offs. Some calls come in regarding setting up payment arrangements.

According to the census about 20% of DCW customers qualify for assistance through LIHEAP. DCW works with LIHEAP and automatically sets up for the CAP (Customer Assistance Plan). These customers receive the first 4 cc of water free per month, but have to pay any fixed charges.

DCW has not surveyed customers in a long time. They may do one next year because the Board has asked for a survey to be completed.

DCW monitors calls and aims for First Call Resolution. DCW monitors to see if the same account has had more than one call in a two week time period. If a customer has called more than once in two weeks, chances are the problem that they originally called about has not been resolved. DCW has 75% only needing to make one call, and 25% calling a second time.

DCW has made significant improvements through technology improvements. Automated meter reading and the accuracy of that data has been tremendous. People can go online daily to see their bill and water usage. The technology has significantly reduced bad debt. Ten years ago, chronic arrearage was \$25 million. Now it is \$5 million.

DCW also has HUNA (High Usage Notification Alert). If the system sees that the account's usage is four (4) times higher than normal over a period of three (3) days, DCW sends out alerts. Customers can have up to four (4) numbers on file that DCW can text, email and call with the alert. DCW sends out about 250 HUNAs per week, compared to sending out 5,000 bills daily. The alerts are a small percentage of billing, but it is pro-active and helps customers identify and respond to problems.

DCW implemented a call review. Five calls for every eight agents have to be reviewed by the supervisor daily. There is specific criteria they are listening for, and each call is scored.

DCW is a union shop, which made it a challenge trying to convince the union to put this in as part of the performance appraisal. They agreed to a system that includes employees scoring their own calls.

The best feature of the DCW call center is the commitment from the executives regarding use of technology and taking customer service seriously.

Employee recruitment needs improvement. This tends to be a place for people to burn out. There needs to be availability for other opportunities for employees and a way to make this a profession. Better efforts to retain the employees are needed.

More public affairs, training, and education about rate increases are another need of the DCW customer service center. DCW needs a better voice in the community.

Rate increases are most significant for the Clean Rivers and Impervious Area charges. It is a fixed rate but went up 20-50% over a year. Now it is a 10% annual increase. Public Affairs can help to educate people about the charges.

DCW has a volunteer program called SPLASH (Serving People by Lending A Supporting Hand). Customers can round up their bill in either dollars/cents. That extra money is then given to the Greater Washington Urban League. People who qualify can get a one-time grant up to \$350 to pay a past due bill. Last year DCW collected \$108,000. It's usually about \$7,500/month. There is also a place on the bill where they can just write in a donation for SPLASH.

#### *Louisville, KY:*

During the period of January 1 – December 31, 2011 there were 63,321 for LMSD with 137,495 total calls which include Metro Louisville. Most common calls concern sewer back-ups, standing water, drainage issues, odors, catch basin problems, man holes and cave-ins.

LMSD does not get many calls regarding billing because the sewer and drain charges are included on the Louisville water bill. LMSD does not do any billing. There was a rate increase of 6.5% on 8/1/12.

The Customer Service Center is currently doing back up satisfaction calls. The results have been positive. The ones that are not are ones with ground restoration issues that have just not let us know about their problems. The CSC is excellent. The best feature is that you can call any time day or night, holidays or weekends and actually talk to a LIVE person! There are 19 employees working in the CSC.

LMSD needs to stabilize continuously changing policies, programs and procedures. Focusing on educating customers about impending changes would be useful.

#### *Milwaukee, WI:*

MMSD does not track calls. The staff usually gets calls if the operator cannot answer a customer's question. Most calls go directly to a customer's local community government, because they own and operate 3,000 miles and we only operate 300 miles of pipe.

MMSD periodically conducts focus groups; it has been awhile since this was done. The customer service department is one staff member who handles community relations.

*Philadelphia, PA:*

PWD gets around 300,000 calls annually. Most are low income program requests for the Revenue Assistance Program (RAP). Many calls are also bill inquiries.

The last customer service survey was conducted by a consulting firm, RKS Design, in 2010. The results were that 60% of those surveyed reported strong satisfaction with their experience; 80% were satisfied with their first call. As the number of times they called increased, their satisfaction decreased.

The Customer Service Center is good but could be better. Response rate is 84%, but there is no way of knowing how many times customers have called. If lines are busy, we can't track that. The center is very antiquated and is hopefully undergoing improvement. There are about 30 lines. If they are full, the line rings "busy" which infuriates people. In addition, if they are on a line, there is no message telling them how long their wait time is or no option to have us call them back. Hopefully the new system will take care of these issues. The best feature of the Center are the staff, who are very competent, friendly, and patient.

There is a four step, four year increase in rates that started July 1, 2012. Generally, public hearings about rate increases are held in the spring and summer. The next increases will likely occur in November, and then in July, 2014. Inserts are included with bills to notify customers of rate increases, which are usually about 3% - 4%. PWD has about 480,000 customers.

*Rochester, NY*

There did not appear to be an active customer call center for the Pure Waters Coalition. All service calls go directly to the Monroe County Department of Environmental Services, of which the Pure Waters Coalition is a sub-unit.

## **Section 6.C: Rate changes**

(questions 3, 7, 12)

### *Buffalo, NY:*

BSA has not had any sewer rate increases. There is a plan for reduction of CSOs being reviewed by the EPA which will likely result in future rate changes.

Rate changes are handled by the Water department. Customers are charged through two avenues: property taxes and water taxes. BSA does not do any direct billing. The portion that is tacked on to the property taxes is based on the value of the home. The water company bills for actual water usage.

### *Central Contra Costa, CA:*

CCCSD rates will probably increase in the next few years. An flat fee increase of \$13/year was passed two years ago and went into effect in July 2012. As mentioned above, only about 200 calls or emails were received regarding the rate increase.

### *Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC:*

The EPA mandated improvements are part of the increases but not what drives rates. CMU rates are driven by the capital improvement program.

There is one fee that is collected and then is split between the city and the county. The fee is based on impervious surface area. The city has two (2) tiers for single family residences:

- Less than 2,000 sq. ft.
- More than 2,000 sq. ft.

Duplexes and multi-family pay per square foot;

The county has four (4) tiers:

- Less than 2,000 sq. ft.
- 2,000-3,000 sq. ft.
- 3,000-5,000 sq. ft.
- Over 5,000 sq. ft.

The city wanted to go to the four tier system but with the recession, the city decided to stick with the two tier system. Stormwater Management came into play in 1993. Every year since 1998, there has been a fee increase.

*District of Columbia:*

DCW has the Clean Rivers Project. DCW is increasing tunnel capacity which is funded through a rate funder fee. It's a fixed rate based on square footage. Charges for the Clean Rivers and Impervious Area programs are the biggest source of rate increases, which have gone up 20% - 50% over the past year (increase in a flat fee). The current projected increase is 10%.

*Louisville, KY:*

Rates have increased based on the following schedule:

- Years 1-5 (just ended 8/1/2012): 6.5%
- Years 6-14: 6%
- Years 15-25: 5.5%

So far, the decreasing degree of rate increases has remained on schedule.

When the rate increase schedule was introduced, there were about 300 meetings held to discuss what it was and why the increases were needed resulting from the EPA Consent Decree. There were a few challenges (to fee increases), mostly from local churches that did not think that they should be paying the drainage fee.

*Milwaukee, WI:*

Rates are steady at this point. A number of years ago the MMSD was sued by the State of Illinois because of frequent CSO incidents (50-60/year) into Lake Michigan (the case went up to the U.S. Supreme Court). MMSD used to have 50-60 overflows/year. MMSD built deep overflow storage tunnels, with the majority of the money coming from state and federal grants. CSOs only occur 2-3 times/year. MMSD budgets have been flat, with 2-3% increases for customers.

Operations are privatized, which saves money for MMSD. Operations only caused a \$3/household increase with the wet industries paying higher fees.

*Philadelphia, PA:*

A four phase rate increase that started ten years ago included a rate increase of 5.7% in July 2010. The 2011 increase was 5.9%. The next increase will likely occur in November, 2012, and then again in July, 2014.

The Water Commissioner determines the rate increases. He holds hearings, listens to the customers and advocates and then decides the rates. But that will be changing shortly. The public found it to be a conflict of interest that the Water Commissioner gets to decide the rate increases.

*Rochester, NY:*

Rochester began the tunnel construction project in the 1970s and was able to secure 70% of the funding from federal grants. The remaining 25% was financed by state and local funds. There was little in the way of costs passed on to sewer customers. Funding is stable; ongoing capital budget expenses are managed by the Pure Waters District.

## **Section 6.D: Intergovernmental relations**

(questions 5, 6, 8)

### *Buffalo, NY:*

BSA works in conjunction with the mayor's office. There was a press event about the BSA Rain Barrel Program. Relations with public officials are good. The stormwater management program is overseen by the BSA Board.

### *Central Contra Costa, CA:*

CCCSO operates independently, but works closely with local community leaders and elected officials. It is most significantly affected by state requirements and regulations.

### *Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC:*

CMU involves a variety of inter-governmental relations. There is both a city and county component for Stormwater Management that has an inter-local agreement.

CMU is overseen by the Charlotte City Council. CMU is a sub-division of engineering and project management. CMU generates its own funds through the water/sewer fee, which goes toward the maintenance of the system or other designated projects. CMU is currently retro-fitting old ponds to produce better water.

There have not had any lawsuits that were rate-related. Three years ago there was a very public discussion regarding rates. But the issues were really more billing-related. Folks had difficulty understanding the way that they are billed. CMU has a conservation-billed rate that increases with usage.

### *District of Columbia:*

Outreach is done through the DC City Council. It's a thirteen member legislative body that acts as city, county and state. DCW primarily deals with them when there is legislation that they need passed or that the council has passed that will impact DCW. Overall, relations between DCW and DC City Council are good.

Rates are established through the Board. The Mayor of DC proposes increases and acts on behalf of MD and VA. There hasn't been any local interference.

A unique feature of DCW is the requirement for consent for fee increases from Congress, which contributes part of the budget for public services for DC. Most of the rate increases are due to EPA mandates. People understand that EPA mandates must be followed.

Stormwater management is conducted through a sub office of the DC Mayor, and is quasi-independent. The stormwater fee is used to establish low impact development. They obtained an aggressive permit that was negotiated between the district and the EPA.

*Louisville, KY:*

The Government Relations staff is a registered legislative agent for the MSD with the General Assembly who has been in government positions for twenty-three (23) years. He worked for Jefferson County as a lobbyist, was Chief of Staff for the Mayor of Louisville, and has worked in Metro government and for the Commonwealth.

Most customer relations are done with the elected officials of Jefferson County whom Steve Tedder has known for many years. He also does a little Congressional work. Relations with public officials are pretty good. There is the occasional grand standing but it's not that often.

Stormwater Management was turned over to LMSD in the 90s. There are five cities that do their own stormwater management. LMSD is in constant contact and it is a good relationship. Other cities usually defer any issues to LMSD.

*Milwaukee, WI:*

MMSD serves twenty-eight (28) municipalities. MMSD is state chartered and governed by state legislation. MMSD receives some state funding and so is in constant contact with the state and EPA.

Relations with local officials are very good. It is dramatically better than it was 10-15 years ago. In the late 90s and early 2000s we had the Sewer Wars involving a court case with Illinois challenging our overflows into Lake Michigan.

Public officials are responsible for making decisions and D&R quality standards. In July 2010 there was tens of thousands of dollars in property damage due to the rains. More money was spent locally to deal with those issues. Over the last two years, MMSD expanded the sewer systems and the Private Property Program has really helped. Money is collected and sent back to the municipalities to work on these kinds of projects. The public officials like it and want to know how they can get more money for more projects. There is a lot more collaboration now.

There is very good regional cooperation related to stormwater management.

*Philadelphia, PA:*

Philadelphia has a community council made up of seventeen health representatives. We do outreach to them. Our focus is local. The Philadelphia City Council addresses any constituent-

related issues. PWD deals with state and congressional representatives, but usually only when there is a funding request.

Relations between the PWD and local public officials are pretty good. Local officials know that PWD is responsive. They may not always agree but they know that PWD will work with them. Elected officials know they can trust PWD to work together for their constituents

A legal challenge began when PWD went from meter to parcel based stormwater fees. PWD has worked with the city council and enhanced assistance programs to minimize the disruption of this change. PWD sent representatives into different regions and held hearings and hosted public meetings.

City Council proposed setting up a Water Board which takes some of the authority away from the Water Commissioner (who is an elected official). PWD is working on what the impact of the Water Board will be and what it will look like.

PWD capped fees to some of its customers and did a “phase in” of fee increases. There is a systems advisory committee that was developed in 2006 that deals with developments and those issues. People generally understand the regulations.

*Rochester, NY:*

The only relevant topic in this interview concerning relations with public officials concerned efforts to get builders to use green technology to reduce runoff. There did not appear to be a relationship established with municipalities to educate builders regarding use of permeable substances for new construction. The regulation of construction is handled by the individual cities and municipalities involved.

**Section 6.E. Sewer Authority communications budgets***Buffalo, NY:*

None provided – from earlier answers, it appears there is little if any budget for external communications, community relations. Nothing found in website searches.

*Central Contra Costa, CA:*

CCCSD has a budget of approximately \$120,000 for community outreach and education.

*Charlotte-Mecklenburg, NC:*

The annual budget for public outreach, community relations and education is about \$300,000, which is equivalent to the cost of retro-fitting one pond for use as a source for drinking water. Mailers to 240,000 households and businesses cost \$9,000/month. Stormwater education is 70% of the budget.

One budget priority is to add another person to serve as a mobile education center. This person would travel across Charlotte-Mecklenburg and set up tables outside grocery stores, community centers, and other high pedestrian traffic areas and pass out educational material. That way CMU could reach more kids and families.

*District of Columbia:*

No budget information provided.

*Louisville, KY:*

The staff interviewed is not involved in media buying or mailings, which are primarily handled by the Customer Relations Department. This person does handle the content of media for Project WIN.

*Milwaukee, WI:*

No budgetary information provided related to community outreach and education.

*Philadelphia, PA:*

No budgetary information provided concerning community outreach and education.

*Rochester, NY:*

Very limited budget, with primary focus on printed literature distributed at community events, use of door hangars, and extensive reliance on website presence.

Part III: Communication Strategies to Increase Awareness of the  
Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

### **Situation**

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District has conducted a variety of public education and awareness programs and initiatives that have had a positive influence on raising public awareness about the importance of sewer management services to keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean. These efforts have helped NEORS D customers to understand the role of the agency in these efforts. The NEORS D needs to increase public education and awareness targeting raising agency name recognition and connection with its work in keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean for recreational use and as a source of drinking water. Two specific projects featured in the work of the NEORS D are Project Clean Lake and the Stormwater Management Program, each of which requires public awareness and education about the role of these projects in fulfilling the mission of keeping the lake clean by reducing untreated sewerage and stormwater overflows into Lake Erie.

### **SWOT Analysis**

#### **Strengths**

- The District has a talented team of communications professionals who understand issues facing the NEORS D and can communicate them to customers effectively.
- The District has earned a higher overall evaluation score than other cities surveyed (Buffalo, Milwaukee & Philadelphia). Approximately 84% of customers rate the District as Excellent, Good or Fair.
- Customers have some awareness of the work already begun with the CSO and Project Clean Lake initiatives, as well as the overall work of the NEORS D.
- Customers recognize the importance of keeping Lake Erie and contributing waterways clean as a source of drinking water and recreational activities.

#### **Weaknesses**

- There are structural constraints that ‘box in’ the NEORS D, such as general public distrust of government; the perception that NEORS D is a ‘monopoly’ that the public has little if any control over; and that the NEORS D does not do its own billing, and is subject to being seen through the lens of public perceptions of its billing agents (primarily the Cleveland City Water Department.) There are also the challenges of the high number of communities served by the NEORS D and the patchwork of parallel service providers.

- Water and sewer services are the last utility that people are paying for which there have not been significant increases in this region (there have been much higher increases in other parts of the country.) People have become accustomed to rapid increases and fluctuations in gas, electric, natural gas prices. This is not something people expect for water and sewer services.
- There is much confusion as to which agency has primary responsibility for keeping Lake Erie and other waterways clean. NEORSD has a brand identity problem.
- The Cleveland Water Department is the billing agent, so the Sewer District is often considered part of the Water Department.
- People don't normally think of what happens when they flush or when it rains heavily...only when the street floods or the sewer backs up.
- Problems with stormwater and flooding are always distressing and often catastrophic. There's a "yuck" factor, and when something goes wrong, people are looking for someone to blame.
- People are already paying high sewer bills.
- Many complaints the District receives about bills are actually the responsibility of the Water Department.

## **Opportunities**

- The NEORSD 'Keeping Our Great Lake Great' campaign has earned rapid high public recognition and can serve as a foundation for future communication initiatives.
- Project Clean Lake and the stormwater management program presents an opportunity for building public awareness and education about the District's mission and services, as well as the problems caused by stormwater runoff.
- Publicity about the new programs will invite media attention and curiosity. It will give the District an opportunity to persuasively build the case for stormwater management, the necessity for fees, credits available, and the need for community involvement.
- There is an opportunity to increase public trust by providing periodic reports on progress of Project Clean Lake and stormwater management initiatives, explaining how funds are being spent, and showing the results of these efforts.
- Helping customers understand how the fees are calculated will start them thinking about the impact of impervious surfaces on the environment.

- Customers will have a better understanding of the demands on storm sewer systems, the role of runoff pollution, and effects on water quality and recreation.

### **Threats**

- Continuing distrust of government in general affecting attitudes towards NEORSD.
- Customers will resist rate the hikes. There may be negative publicity.
- Residential fees may become unaffordable for some.
- Cost of compliance for businesses may be too high.
- Cost of converting impervious surfaces back to natural states may be too high.
- Reluctance of local governments to participate through lack of funding.

### **General recommendations for communication strategies**

Restatement of a set of key challenges facing the NEORSD identified in the SWOT analysis:

1. Public distrust of government, fueled in part by recent scandals involving Cuyahoga County and (in prior years) NEORSD.
2. NEORSD is perceived as a monopoly that is not accountable to the public.
3. NEORSD does not do its own billing.
4. Anonymity of service (people think about the water coming out of the tap, but do not think about what goes down the drain.)

Overcoming these obstacles is a core mission of public communications.

\* There are a few government agencies with high name recognition and visibility (mostly federal): EPA, NASA, CIA. The vast majority of government agencies at all levels of government are unknown by the general public.

\* Continuous communication with the public is an important component of making the connection between the NEORSD and the identified public priority of keeping Lake Erie and area waterways clean.

- \* Constant, continuous repetition of the link between NEORSD's work and clean waterways is essential for getting the message to sink in with the public.
- \* Need to adjust expectations concerning individuals' accuracy in recall about messaging, and about awareness of agencies responsible for public services such as waste treatment.
- \* Further analysis of budgets for communications work in other sewer districts is needed. How much is reasonable? Factor in size of districts and their priorities for communications.
- \* The need for a more comprehensive campaign approach for NEORSD; what are the central priorities, and how does each communications initiative advance the central priority?
- \* Messaging priorities:
  - \* How well is the NEORSD doing?
  - \* Do you (the customer) get your money's worth?
  - \* Are people aware of the issues related to NEORSD work?
  - \* Does NEORSD provide good customer service?
- \* Public awareness efforts require TIME as well as money. Changing public opinion takes many years (e.g., 40+ years of change in public opinion about smoking.)
- \* Discuss what Community Relations has done successfully for NEORSD (e.g., high public priority for clean lake; high recognition of slogans; high recognition of NEORSD in aided response questions).
- \* Continue to battle public distrust of government – NEORSD communications are also a key element of civic engagement, helping the public understand how critical public services are delivered.
- \* Delivery of services is not sufficient as a basis for people understanding what NEORSD is or does. This needs to be accompanied by public communications efforts.
- \* NEORSD should focus part of its communications on the legacy of environmental cleanup – that the creation of the EPA was in part a response to the dramatic pictures of the burning Cuyahoga River. The changes to the condition of Lake Erie and area rivers since 1970 are a compelling testament to the importance of the work of agencies such as the NEORSD.
- \* Emphasize health benefits of having a clean lake and waterways.

## **Suggestions for public event strategies to promote the work of the NEORSD**

Events need to be organized by NEORSD, not just sponsored by NEORSD. Possible events include:

- sponsoring a fishing competition to attract attention of outdoor sporting community;
- a triathlon event that includes a lake swim to highlight the cleanliness of the lake;
- engaging area college students from health and physical education majors to organize and staff a summer swimming instruction program for urban kids that uses Lake Erie for swimming. This could also include a beach cleanup element (on days when the lake is not available for swimming after heavy CSO events); a science component (water testing); and competitions at the end of the sessions. Also, this could be co-sponsored as a health initiative by the Cleveland Clinic to raise the profile of NEORSD;
- an ‘evening by the lake’ social event for adults, perhaps as a fundraiser for an environmental charity that is sponsored by the NEORSD;
- Try out different types of events over a one or two year period as pilots, and assess effectiveness at raising profile of NEORSD, particularly through media coverage. Goal should be to find an event that ‘brands’ the NEORSD, similar to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Walk, the CVS Marathon, etc.
- Need to promote public awareness of affordability programs – show that NEORSD cares about issue of affordability – focus communications on broader public, not just eligible customers.

## **Stormwater management communications**

Although much has already been written and broadcast about the stormwater fees, we know that a large percentage of customers are not aware of when the fee will start, how it will be calculated, and how much it will cost them individually.

After the election, the District will begin to ramp up communications to customers in a variety of media about the necessity of stormwater management and the associated fees beginning in 2013.

A series of mailings will be sent to customers explaining:

- Why a stormwater management program is necessary
- What the program will do
- How much it will cost
- Credits that may be available

Workshops will be conducted. Ads will be placed. Articles will be written. Radio and TV spots will air. And many customers will still be in the dark until they get their bill.

We know from our research that many customers are still confused about which agency is primarily responsible for providing stormwater related services. In the minds of customers, NEORS is one of eight potential service providers.

It will be the task of the District's marketing communications team to help sort out this confusion and give customers a better understanding of what it does and why Stormwater Management is important.

It will take time and the employment of many different communication tools and media. The message will need to be repeated over and over again. And it will take some creative thinking and implementation. In advertising, we call this Reach, Frequency and Impact.

In this part of the Customer Awareness/Satisfaction Survey, we recommend strategies and themes for message content, creativity and delivery.

### **Communications Objectives**

In general terms, NEORS stormwater marketing communications objectives have several components. They may be categorized as follows:

- Awareness
- Education
- Acceptance
- Action

Awareness and Education may be thought of as shorter term objectives targeting groups who are not aware of the stormwater program, or if they are aware, don't really understand much about it. We know from our research that about 25% of the public doesn't know if stormwater is treated or not before it goes into the Lake.

There are some negative perceptions of the Sewer District that we must try to overcome. For example, 40% of those surveyed in northeast Ohio do not feel they are getting their money's worth when they are paying their sewer bill.

The stormwater fee will get attention and present opportunities for education about the program and its benefits. Communications activities beginning in November will create a buzz, but Awareness and Education should be on-going activity.

Longer term, the District should be looking for customer Acceptance and Action leading to changed behavior. Getting involved in a community project such as building a rain garden, converting unused business parking lots into green spaces or individual actions such as buying a

rain barrel or properly disposing of pharmaceuticals are positive actions. Get people to start asking, “What can I do?”

Other actions that are desirable:

- Disposing of trash and recyclables
- Proper disposal of pet-waste
- Care when applying lawn-chemicals
- Using bio-degradable soaps for washing cars and other outdoor items
- Avoiding changing motor-oil on impervious driveways
- Properly disposing leftover paint and household chemicals

Acceptance and Action may come quickly with some, but wholesale behavior changes usually come slowly as customers learn more about the program and its benefits. That’s why continuing education is vital to long term success.

### **Target Audiences**

The gas station owner and landscaping company impact the stormwater system in different ways. Both will respond better to messages that identify with their concerns and are much more likely to change polluting behaviors when they understand how their businesses impact the environment.

- Residential customers
- Commercial/Industrial customers
- Builders, contractors, and developers
- Schools
- Local community leaders
- Landscaping companies
- Condominium associations
- Apartment owners

We have surveyed education levels and annual household income. We also have data on the types media being used and will take these factors into consideration in our creative strategies.

- Daily newspaper
- Local newspaper
- Regional publications
- National websites
- Local websites
- Radio
- Television
- Social websites

There are a variety of other less used communications vehicles that should also be considered for targeted messaging.

- Electronic
- Outdoor
- Transit
- Events
- Sponsorships
- Speakers

### **Creative Strategies**

As with any marketing communications strategy, targeted messages to specific audiences have the best chance of succeeding. Some general guidelines for targeted communications...

- Show the benefits of preventing stormwater pollution entering the rivers and Lake.
- Tell the audience what specific steps or actions they should take to prevent runoff pollution.
- Give the audience incentives to reduce polluting behaviors (get creative with credits or start an awards program for best practices in stormwater management).
- Use trusted, recognized and popular media personalities, sports figures, community leaders, etc. to get the message out.
- Use arresting graphics, music, humor, creative designs and great photography
- Produce materials in different languages

## **EVENTS**

### **Running for Runoff Prevention**

A Series of 5k/10k runs sponsored by NEORSD in conjunction with local municipalities.

Sponsorship money could go to a community rain garden, storm drain cleanup, or other stormwater management projects.

Website could be setup to accept donations. Runners would ask for sponsors; would increase awareness with public and media.

### **Rally in the Valley**

Family bike rides from Cleveland to Akron through Cuyahoga Valley National Park. NEORSD could have an informational booth setup at the starting point.

A flyer discussing the importance of keeping the Cuyahoga Valley watershed pollution free would be a natural tie-in.

Another booth with water and other refreshments could be setup along the way. Permits are necessary, but should not be a problem.

## **BROCHURE FOR SCHOOLS**

### **Storm Sewer Secrets ... or Tales From The Pipes.**

*What really lurks down there...and why you should never ever go in!*

An educational brochure/flyer aimed at schools on stormwater issues and pollution prevention, but with a twist...

Dotted throughout the brochure would be photos/graphics of some of the strangest, most interesting, gross or frightening objects ever found in sewers over the years.

It could also be made into a great PowerPoint presentation with video. In fact, there's a YouTube video of a large worm like creature recently found in a sewer in North Carolina that's bound to enthrall the boys.

## **INDUSTRY SPECIFIC BROCHURES**

### **Best Management Practices for Commercial Customers**

This would be a series of flyers and PDFs residing at your website designed to educate specific customers who have the potential create major stormwater pollution.

The Flyers would outline the best management practices for controlling and disposing of pollutants rather than have them run off into the storm sewer system.

### **Automotive Repair, Fleet Operators, School Bus Operations**

*Fluid Retention for Fleets*  
*Sewer Bills and Spills*

For these customers, the District could give them specific tips on how best to control and get rid of:

- Motor oils
- Fuels

- Antifreeze
- Brake fluid and brake lining
- Paint
- Solvents
- Batteries
- Lubricants

## **Landscaping & Lawn Care Professionals**

*The Green Landscaper*  
*Designing for Stormwater Management*

To help reduce the runoff of fertilizers, pesticides, etc., the District should give lawn care professionals specific tips on landscape planning, design, irrigation, and maintenance to reduced stormwater pollution. This information can also be repurposed for the homeowner and construction audiences. *Green Landscaping*

## **PR/PUBLICITY**

*The Drain Patrol...Stalking the Sewers.*

Paint some of your trucks in a camo colored theme with military style stencil lettering. Send out news release with photos to the media. Or invite them to a press conference and “unveiling” ceremony.

Have the trucks on hand whenever there is a sponsorship event. Organize community clean-ups and have the trucks present. Inform the media when and where they will be held.

The Drain Patrol trucks will give you wide media exposure and recognition in the community. It also has a “*cool factor*” that enhances your brand.

People will know that when they see the trucks in their area, they are protecting them from flooded basements and stormwater pollution.

Merchandising opportunities are obvious: T-Shirts, Mugs, Hats, etc.

## **SPONSORSHIP: WATER QUALITY INDEX**

Since the District already partners with the USCG’s on the Ohio Nowcast, you have a perfect opportunity to deliver a public service and message about water quality.

This can be a nightly TV spot in the summer months shown during the weather forecast sponsored by the District. A graphic can be developed that indicates Good or Advisory with the neorsd.org web address.

The same graphic can appear on the District's website and can also appear, with link embedded, on local TV/Radio station websites, Cleveland.com, Ohio.com and in the Plain Dealer.

Currently only about 10% of the surveyed audience said they go to the District's website for information about Lake Erie water quality. We'd like to see the District's website become the number one site for information about water quality.

The more places the graphic is seen the more the public will begin to equate water quality with NEORSD efforts to keep the waterways clean. Sponsoring the Water Quality Index will keep stormwater issues in the forefront with the media and public.

## **RAIN BARREL PROMOTION**

### ***Partnership With Big Box Home Improvement Stores***

This program would offer discounts on the purchase of rain barrels. The District could partner with Home Depot and Lowes and provide Point of Purchase displays next to the rain barrels with literature on stormwater management and promoting the advantages of using them.

## **PR/FEATURE ARTICLES**

PR must be ongoing and one of the best ways to educate and impact behavior over the long run is to prepare feature articles on the major issues relating to stormwater management.

These articles can reside at your website and can be a starting point for local editors or they can become the complete story for those newspapers and magazines that are understaffed and don't have the time to generate their own copy.

Not only can the stormwater fee issue be thoroughly dealt with, the articles provide the District with an opportunity to tell the complete story. No one needs to be in the dark about the importance of stormwater pollution. Anyone visiting the website can open, download and read as much as they care to about the subject.

Because NEORSD is a regional entity, local newspapers may want to personalize these issues by interviewing local officials about stormwater initiatives in their own community. Local officials could be encouraged to present awards for companies in their community that

are engaging in effective stormwater management. Awards will give the companies an opportunity to promote their business with local media.

Email announcements with links can be sent to your Media List informing editors about the article archive available at your site. Editors should be encouraged to use the information statistics, photos, etc.

Use compelling headlines and lead-ins to the stories.

***Storming the Sewers ...***

Article about what the District is doing to prevent stormwater flooding in your community.

***\$5 per month buys a much cleaner lake.***

Article discusses how residential stormwater fees will help stop X-million (actual number needed) gallons of stormwater pollution from entering Lake Erie in 2013.

***Pains in the Drains...dumping pills is bad medicine.*** Article describes the problem with dumping drugs and other medical waste into the sewer system.

***Fed up with flooding? Call the Drain Patrol!*** Article talks about the Flooding Hotline (or Drain Patrol Hotline) and how the District responds to emergency flooding situations

## **RADIO SPOTS**

Campaign ideas:

***Sewer Backup Insurance***

Do you have sewage backup insurance? Most homeowner's policies don't cover sewer backups. Your Regional Sewer district is working hard to control stormwater runoff and flooding. But if you live in an area prone to backups, you can protect yourself with sewer backup insurance. Costs are reasonable. Call your insurance agent. For more information about stormwater issues, visit [neorsd.org](http://neorsd.org).

***Sewer Check Valves***

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District reminds you if you have a problem with sewage backup you might think about installing a sewer line check valve. The check valve allows sewer flow away from the home but not back in it. Check with a licensed plumber and your local city about installation costs and permits. For more tips on controlling stormwater, visit [neorsd.org](http://neorsd.org)

## ADVERTISING THEMES

The following themes cover topics that people can relate to individually. Clean drinking water...clean swimming pools...individual actions to mitigate stormwater runoff.

**We all drink recycled water.**

*Shouldn't the source be as clean as possible?*

**You keep your swimming pool clean don't you?**

*So do we. Ours is just bigger.*

**You wouldn't want sewers draining in to your pool.**

*We don't either.*

**Your Regional Sewer District...keeping our community pool clean.**

*Stormwater fees: Think of it as pool maintenance.*

**Your sewer bill is going up...**

*But there is something you can do about it.*

## Appendix 1: Landline Phone Survey Questionnaire

The following questionnaire was used for each of the four landline phone surveys of customers served by the sewer authorities in Cleveland (NEORS only), Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. Questions and responses were revised where necessary to fit the local circumstance of each survey area.

### **1. Introduction**

Hello!

My name is .....and I am a student at Baldwin Wallace University. I am participating in a research project for a non-profit organization. I am not selling anything. I would like to talk to a person who is older than 18 in your household. Are you older than 18?

Interviewer (if No)

Is there anyone older than 18 who can come to the phone now? Thank you.

Interviewer (repeat only if new person) I am a student at Baldwin Wallace University, and I am participating in a research project for a non-profit organization. I am not selling anything.

I would like you to help me by answering a few questions. Could I please ask you for about ten minutes of your time?

Thank you very much.

### **2. Respondent Priorities**

Please indicate your level of concern for each of the following issues using one of the following response choices: please answer using the following numbers:

1. a very important concern
2. an important concern
3. minor concern
4. not a concern

Keeping Lake Erie clean for recreational use.

Keeping Lake Erie clean as a source of drinking water.

Minimizing the chance of street flooding in my neighborhood.

Minimizing the chance of basement flooding in my neighborhood.

Keeping sewer rates/service affordable.

Keeping water rates/service affordable.

Maintaining the quality of our drinking water.

Keeping area rivers and streams clean for recreational use (e.g., Cuyahoga River, Rocky River, Mill Stream Run).

### **3. Unaided Government recall questions**

(note: different response options developed for surveys conducted in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia)

Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for keeping Lake Erie clean?

First response:

Second response:

Don't know:

Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for helping to keep polluted water from flowing into Lake Erie?

First response:

Second response:

Don't know:

Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for preventing neighborhood flooding?

First response:

Second response:

Don't know:

Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for keeping local streams free from pollution?

First response:

Second response:

Don't know:

Which agency or agencies do you think is responsible for issuing your water and sewer bill?

First response:

Second response:

Don't know:

#### 4. Government agencies aided recall

A list of the following agencies was provided for each of the questions in this section. Respondents were asked to identify which agency was responsible for handling the specific issue identified in the question.

(note: different response options developed for surveys conducted in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia)

Federal Environmental Protection Agency

State Environmental Protection Agency

Water Department

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

Your city's Municipal Government

Cleveland's Municipal Government

Cuyahoga County's Government

Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to keep Lake Erie and area rivers and streams clean? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to maintain the quality of our drinking water? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

Which of the following agencies are responsible for helping to prevent flooding of basements and streets? Please answer with YES or NO for each agency listed.

Which of the following agencies are responsible for cleaning water AFTER we use it (wastewater)?

Which agency impresses you as being most responsive to customers' needs?

#### 5. Specific questions about the cleanliness of Lake Erie

I am going to ask you a few questions about the cleanliness of Lake Erie.

Do you know whether stormwater (rain water that runs off roofs and streets) goes into Lake Erie with or without treatment?

Always Treated

Mostly Treated

Mostly Untreated

Always Untreated Don't Know

Do you know whether dirty water from household uses goes into Lake Erie with or without treatment?

Always Treated      Mostly Treated      Mostly Untreated      Always Untreated      Don't Know

Do you know whether bacteria level at Lake Erie beaches make it safe or unsafe to swim in the Lake?

Always Safe      Mostly Safe      Mostly Unsafe      Always Unsafe      Don't Know

Do you know whether it is possible to find information about Lake Erie water quality?

Always Possible      Mostly Possible      Mostly Impossible      Always Impossible      Don't Know

Which media do you use to get information about Lake Erie water quality?

(note: different response options developed for surveys conducted in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia)

EPA website

Cleveland Plain Dealer

Sewer District's website

Metroparks' website

Ohio Parks' website

Other (please specify)

## **6. Unaided Recall about NEORSD Educational Initiatives**

(note: different response options developed for surveys conducted in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia)

I am now going to ask you about a few programs. Could you please tell me whether you have heard of them? If yes, what entity is responsible for them?

PUP or Pick Up Poop

Where Does It Go?

Keeping our Great Lake great

Business Opportunity Program

Recycle Today for a Better Future Tomorrow

We've Got it All. Together.

Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle

### **8. Specific Questions about sewer district performance**

I am now going to ask you your opinion about a few of the agencies in Northeast Ohio (or Buffalo, Milwaukee, Philadelphia) and their performance.

Please choose from the following ratings: Very poor, poor, fair, good, excellent.

Overall, how would you rate the water department's job in providing drinking water?

Very poor      poor      fair      good      excellent

Overall, how would you rate the sewer district's job in treating wastewater?

Very poor      poor      fair      good      excellent

Do you feel you are getting your money's worth when you pay your water bill?

Mostly no      in between      mostly yes      Don't know

Do you feel you are getting your money's worth when you pay your sewer bill?

Mostly no      in between      mostly yes      Don't know

### **9. Questions about media usage**

(note: different response options developed for surveys conducted in Buffalo, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia)

I am going to ask you a few questions about the type of media you use each week.

Could you tell me whether you use or read (yes, no, which one):

A daily regional newspaper, such as the Plain Dealer or the Akron Beacon Journal?

A local newspaper, such as the Sun Newspaper or Westlife?

A regional publication such as Cleveland Magazine, Crain's, or Lake Erie Living?

A national website, such as the New York Times or CNN?

A national or local radio?

A local website, such as Cleveland.com or Ohio.com?

A television station?

A social media website?

In your view, which station, paper or website has the most trustworthy source of information?

First response

Second response

Don't know

## 10. Demographic questions

We are almost finished with the survey. I am now going to ask you a few questions about yourself. Please know that this information is kept confidential, and will only be used in group form to analyze the demographics of responses to the survey:

In which city do you live?

In which zip code do you live?

Which best characterizes your current situation? Are you a homeowner, are you renting, or are you living with a parent, relative or friend?

How many other people live in your household?

Number of adults:

Number of children (under 18):

What is your gender?

What is your level of education?

Did not finish high school  
High school diploma / G.E.D.  
Some college or technical school  
Bachelor's degree  
Graduate or professional degree

What range best characterizes your annual household income?

Less than \$ 20,000 a year  
Between \$ 20,000 and \$ 40,000  
Between \$ 40,000 and \$ 60,000  
Between \$ 60,000 and \$ 80,000  
Between \$ 80,000 and \$ 100,000  
More than \$ 100,000

What best characterizes your ethnic background?

African – American  
Asian – American  
Caucasian  
Hispanic  
Other or more than one of the other choices

Are you a registered voter? Yes      No      Don't Know

(for NEORSD survey only): Finally, would you be willing to participate in a panel discussion on the sewer district's role in reducing the pollution in Lake Erie? This would take about an hour. You would be compensated \$50 for your time. You will be contacted later with the specifics. Contact information if yes or maybe.

Interviewer: if respondent wants more information, or someone to speak to about the survey, please ask them to contact Tom Sutton, Director, Baldwin Wallace University Community Research Institute, at [tsutton@bw.edu](mailto:tsutton@bw.edu), or by phone at 440-826-2460.

## Appendix 2: Customer Service Center User Survey Questionnaire

Hello!

My name is .....and I am a student at Baldwin Wallace University. I am participating in a research project for Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District. I am not selling anything.

I would like to talk to a person who is older than 18 in your household. Are you older than 18?

In the past two months, you called the sewer district's customer service center. Do you recall making this phone call?

Yes                      No

**If Yes**, continue with question 1.

**If No**. Do you know if anybody else in your household made a phone call to the Sewer District's Customer Service Center?

Yes      No

**If Yes**. Is that person here tonight? Could I talk to him or her?

**If No to either question**. Thank you very much. Have a pleasant evening.

1. Do you recall what your reason was for calling customer service at the sewer district? Could you tell me what it was?

2. Did the customer service representative understand the reason for your call?

Yes      Only partially              No                      I don't know

3. Was the issue you called about resolved right away?      Yes      No

4. Did you have to call back to get it resolved?

Yes                      No

If yes,                      How many times?

Once                      Twice                      more than twice                      It's still not resolved

5. Were you directed to the appropriate entity to help you with your issue?

Yes No

6. Was the problem resolved to your satisfaction?

Yes No Not yet I have given up

7. If you had to leave a message and wait for a call back from a NEORS D rep, were you called back promptly?

Yes No Not really Have not been called back yet

8. How would you rate your experience with the NEORS D customer service department?

Excellent Good Fair Poor

9. How do you feel that NEORS D customer service department rates in comparison to the customer service department of other utility services that you have had experience with?

Better than other utility services

About the same as other utility services

Worse than other utility services

11. Now, please think about the best customer service that you have ever received, from any company, as receiving a grade of A. How would you grade your overall experience with the sewer district customer service?

A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ D D- F

12. Do you have any suggestions for ways to improve services of the NEORS D? (open-ended response)

### Appendix 3: Focus Group Interview Questionnaires

#### Questions for household survey respondents:

1. Which agency is responsible for sending your water and sewer bill? How often are you billed? Have you noticed changes to your billing amounts?
2. Have you ever called the NEORSD Customer Service Center for assistance? If so, what was your experience?
3. The NEORSD is responsible for providing your sewer services. How effective do you think the District is in their work?
4. Sewer rates have begun to increase, and will rise a projected (get percentage and rate) over the next (# years) in order to pay for a new system to store untreated water during storms that can then be treated before being returned to Lake Erie (get cost and timeline of project). Do you think the rate increases are reasonable for the size of the project?
5. What do you think are the most effective ways to communicate with the public about sewer rate increases needed to pay for the untreated water storage system?
6. What would be the best ways for the Sewer District to provide information about beach and water quality to the public?
7. The NEORSD is starting a stormwater abatement program that will charge an average fee of \$5/month to household customers based on the square footage of hard surfaces on their property. The funds will be used for developing programs to reduce stormwater runoff in the region served by the NEORSD, and also act as a small incentive to encourage property owners to find ways to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff from their property. What are your thoughts about this initiative?
8. The NEORSD wants to help customers get a better understanding of their work. What suggestions do you have for helping people learn more about the NEORSD? For instance, would you notice the NEORSD logo as a sponsor of local weather broadcasts?
9. Do you think Lake Erie and regional waterways (e.g., Cuyahoga River, Rocky River) are important to the economy of NE Ohio? Why or why not?
10. Do you attend public meetings? How often, at which entities (e.g., school board, city council, public agency), and why?

Questions for business and nonprofit representatives:

1. Which agency is responsible for sending your water and sewer bill? How often are you billed? Have you noticed changes to your billing amounts?
2. Have you ever called the NEORSD Customer Service Center for assistance? If so, what was your experience?
3. The NEORSD is responsible for providing your sewer services. How effective do you think the District is in their work?
4. Sewer rates have begun to increase, and will rise a projected (get percentage and rate) over the next (# years) in order to pay for a new system to store untreated water during storms that can then be treated before being returned to Lake Erie (get cost and timeline of project). Do you think the rate increases are reasonable for the size of the project?
5. What do you think are the most effective ways to communicate with the public about sewer rate increases needed to pay for the untreated water storage system?
6. The NEORSD is starting a stormwater abatement program that will charge a monthly fee based on the square footage of impervious surfaces on their property, including roofs and parking areas. The area of coverage will be determined through use of a GPS digital mapping system. The funds will be used for developing programs to reduce stormwater runoff in the region served by the NEORSD, and also act as an incentive to encourage property owners to find ways to reduce the amount of stormwater runoff from their property. How do you think this will affect your business/organization?
7. The NEORSD wants to help customers get a better understanding of their work. What suggestions do you have for helping people learn more about the NEORSD? For instance, would you notice the NEORSD logo as a sponsor of local weather broadcasts?
8. Do you think Lake Erie and regional waterways (e.g., Cuyahoga River, Rocky River) are important to the economy of NE Ohio? Why or why not?
9. Do you attend public meetings? How often, at which entities (e.g., school board, city council, public agency), and why?

### Appendix 4: Elected Official Interview Questionnaire

1. Please tell me your perceptions of the work of the NEORSD. Do you think your constituents are getting high quality and efficient service? Why or why not?
2. What role do you think the NEORSD plays in keeping Lake Erie and local waterways clean?
3. Why do you think NEORSD is raising rates for sewer service?
4. What do you know about the Regional Stormwater Management Program? How do you think it will affect the residents of your community?
5. Have you heard or seen community awareness initiatives conducted by the NEORSD? What do you think could be done to help your community develop a better understanding of what NEORSD does?
6. Any other suggestions or comments?

## Appendix 5: Sewer District Staff Interview Questionnaire

1. What kinds of public outreach, education programs do you conduct? Types, how often, how many people attend events?
2. Do you conduct media public awareness efforts? What messaging do you use? What types of media?
3. Are your sewer/water rates increasing because of EPA mandated improvements? If so, are you conducting a public awareness campaign to explain the increase to your customers? (if so, get details.)
4. Do you think your customers understand your agency and its function? Would you like to see improvements in customer awareness?
5. Explain your work with public/elected officials.
6. How would you evaluate relations between your sewer district and local public officials?
7. Has your district had any legal challenges to rate increases and/or new projects by citizens and/or communities served by your district?
8. How have public officials handled stormwater management in your area? What is the relationship of local municipalities with the sewer district related to stormwater management?
9. How many calls do you get annually? What types of calls are typical?
10. Have you conducted any customer satisfaction surveys? If so, results?
11. How would you rate your Customer Service Center? What are your best features? What are areas for improvement?
12. Have changes in sewer and/or water rates been a reason for customer calls? About how many/percentage?
13. What is your annual external communications budget?