

The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

May 14, 2003
(Release 143-3)

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Wednesday, May 14, 2003 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

CONCERNS ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT DECLINE

BUT NEW JERSEYANS WANT STATE TO STAY VIGILANT WITH ANTI-POLLUTION MEASURES

In a post-Saddam world and with the state facing a large budget deficit, New Jersey's views on the seriousness of environmental problems and water pollution have declined. Less than one-third of residents view these environmental conditions as very serious problems today. Just a few years ago, most New Jerseyans saw these as very serious problems in the state. And while environmental concerns have abated, New Jerseyans – by a 2 to 1 margin – still support the enforcement of strict anti-pollution laws.

These are some of the main findings of the most recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*. The current survey was conducted by telephone with a random sample of 1,002 New Jersey adults. The poll has a margin of sampling error of ± 3.1 percent.

Nearly 1-in-3 (32%) New Jerseyans feel that environmental problems in the state are very serious, compared to 21 percent who feel they are not too serious. A plurality of 46 percent feels that the environment is a somewhat serious concern. This marks a sharp change from a poll taken in March 2000, when a majority in the state – 54 percent – felt that environmental problems had become very serious and only 9 percent saw them as not too serious.

The trend in opinions on water pollution is even more telling. In a series of polls stretching back over 19 years, at least half of all residents felt that the problem of water pollution was very serious. The current poll shows that number to have dropped dramatically. Today, only about 1-in-4 residents (27%) say water pollution is a very serious problem in New Jersey

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

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compared to an identical number who call it not too serious (27%). Another 41 percent feel water pollution is somewhat serious.

While environmental concern has diminished, a majority (51%) feel that the overall natural environment is actually about the same as it was three years ago. One-in four (25%) feel it has gotten better and 1-in-5 (21%) say it has gotten worse.

“The environment has been a key issue in New Jersey for the past generation. These recent poll numbers indicate a marked change from long established trends in the state,” remarked Patrick Murray, the poll’s associate director. “However, the decline in concern seems to be only partially linked to attitudes about the actual quality of the environment. Other factors affecting the world and the state may have pushed these concerns to the back-burner for now. At the same, time residents want the state to remain vigilant about protecting the environment.”

The survey found that more than 6-in-10 residents (63%) would choose to maintain strict anti-pollution laws, even if those laws discourage economic growth. Another 31 percent would prefer to see these laws relaxed to create more jobs. Support for maintaining strict laws is in line with levels measured by Eagleton since November 1984, when the environment was seen as a more serious problem.

Murray remarked, “Even during a middling economy, most New Jerseyans want the state to continue enforcing strong environmental measures.” In the most recent poll, suburban residents (67% in established towns and 65% in higher growth areas) are somewhat more likely than urban residents (54%) to want strict environmental laws kept on the books.

The *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* also found somewhat greater levels of concern when residents think about the water quality in their own homes. Nearly half (49%) of all New Jerseyans are very concerned about the quality of the water their family drinks compared to only 27 percent who are not very concerned. Another 24 percent say they are somewhat concerned about the impact of drinking water on their family’s health. However – like concerns about water pollution in general – these concerns have diminished in the past few years. Ten years ago, 71 percent of New Jerseyans were very concerned about their drinking water and in March 2000 this number stood at 59 percent.

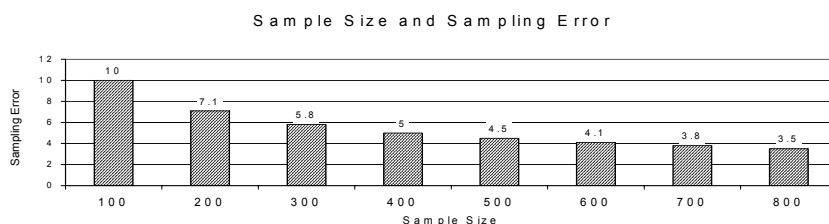
In fact, most residents rate the quality of their home’s tap water as either excellent (18%) or good (41%). One-in-four (26%) say it is fair and 13 percent feel their home has poor quality tap water. “Like views on water quality in general, concerns over drinking water have

diminished and most say their tap water is fine,” observed Murray, “but oddly, most don’t drink it. We may simply have become a bottled water culture, regardless of any improvements to water quality.”

Currently, 58 percent of New Jerseyans drink bottled or filtered water exclusively and another 14 percent drink both bottled water and water straight from their tap. Only 27 percent say they drink water from the tap exclusively. These numbers are virtually unchanged from a poll taken three years ago. Urban residents – who are somewhat less likely to feel their home’s tap water is excellent or good – are more likely than suburbanites to imbibe only bottled or filtered water (71% to 55% respectively).

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP143-3) May 14, 2003

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from April 24 to May 4 with a scientifically selected random sample of 1002 New Jersey adults. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for 1002 is ± 3.1 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to be less likely to agree with a statement, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.9 and 53.1 percent (50 ± 3.1) had all New Jersey residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported for residents of North, Central and South Jersey, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this background memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“Now on a different subject... Overall, how serious do you think environmental problems are in New Jersey—very serious, somewhat serious, or not too serious?” [EN1]

	<u>Very Serious</u>	<u>Somewhat Serious</u>	<u>Not Too Serious</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	32%	46%	21%	1%	100%	(1002)
<u>Community Type</u>						
--Urban	35	37	25	3	100	(195)
--Stable Suburb	33	49	17	1	100	(386)
--Growth Area	29	47	24	1	101	(411)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
--March 2000	54	35	9	1	99	(800)

“In the past 3 years, do you feel the overall natural environment in New Jersey has gotten better, worse, or stayed about the same?” [EN2]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Stay about Same</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	25%	21%	51%	3%	100%	(1002)
<u>Community Type</u>						
--Urban	23	20	52	4	99	(195)
--Stable Suburb	24	23	48	4	99	(386)
--Growth Area	26	18	54	1	99	(411)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
--March 2000	26	30	40	4	100	(800)
--June 1993	36	15	45	3	99	(801)

“Some people say that anti-pollution laws discourage the growth of jobs and industry. If you had to choose between maintaining strict anti-pollution laws or relaxing those laws to create more jobs in New Jersey, which would you choose?” [EN3]

	<u>Maintain strict laws</u>	<u>Relax laws</u>	<u>Both/ rejects choice</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	63%	31%	3%	4%	101%	(1002)
<i><u>Community Type</u></i>						
--Urban	54	40	1	6	101	(195)
--Stable Suburb	67	25	3	5	100	(386)
--Growth Area	65	30	3	2	100	(411)
<i><u>Seriousness of problem</u></i>						
--Very	73	22	4	1	100	(321)
--Somewhat	66	27	2	4	99	(471)
--Not too	41	51	1	8	101	(198)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
--March 2000	71	19	3	7	100	(800)
--June 1993	64	28	3	5	100	(801)
--November 1990	60	30	4	6	100	(800)
--August 1987	69	19	5	7	100	(800)
--November 1984	61	27	--	12	100	(500)
--February 1984	49	37	--	14	100	(502)
--September 1982	56	34	--	10	100	(502)
--July 1977	46	46	--	8	100	(1004)

“How serious is the problem of water pollution in New Jersey—very serious, somewhat serious or not too serious?” [EN4]

	<u>Very Serious</u>	<u>Somewhat Serious</u>	<u>Not Too Serious</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	27%	41%	27%	6%	101%	(1002)
<i><u>Community Type</u></i>						
--Urban	31	30	33	6	101	(195)
--Stable Suburb	29	43	23	5	100	(386)
--Growth Area	21	45	27	6	99	(411)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
--September 2002	52	31	14	3	100	(804)
--March 2000	56	31	11	2	100	(800)
--June 1993	55	29	13	3	100	(801)
--November 1990	48	35	16	2	101	(800)
--August 1987	61	24	11	3	99	(800)
--October 1986	64	25	9	2	100	(800)
--November 1984	55	27	13	5	100	(500)
--February 1984	59	33	6	3	101	(804)

“How would you rate the water quality of the tap water coming into your home—excellent, good, only fair or poor?” [EN5]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	18%	41%	26%	13%	3%	101%	(1002)
<u>Community Type</u>							
--Urban	8	39	32	20	1	100	(195)
--Stable Suburb	18	44	25	11	3	101	(386)
--Growth Area	25	38	23	11	3	100	(411)
<u>Region</u>							
North	17	40	29	13	2	101	(461)
Central	18	45	24	9	3	99	(251)
South	22	37	21	16	4	100	(274)
<u>Past Surveys</u>							
March 2000	16%	42%	24%	16%	3%	101%	(800)

“Thinking about your family’s health, how concerned are you about the quality of the water you drink—very concerned, somewhat concerned, or not very concerned?” [EN6]

	<u>Very Concerned</u>	<u>Somewhat Concerned</u>	<u>Not Very Concerned</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	49%	24%	27%	--	100%	(1002)
<u>Community Type</u>						
--Urban	56	26	17	1	100	(195)
--Stable Suburb	50	24	26	--	100	(386)
--Growth Area	45	21	34	--	100	(411)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
March 2000	59	26	14	1	100	(800)
June 1993	71	18	11	1	101	(801)
August 1987	65	18	14	3	100	(800)

“Does your family use bottled or filtered water for drinking, or do you drink water right out of the tap?” [EN7]

	<u>Bottled/filtered</u>	<u>Tap water</u>	<u>Both/mixture</u>	<u>Don't know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	58%	27%	14%	1%	100%	(1002)
<u>Community Type</u>						
--Urban	71	18	11	--	100	(195)
--Stable Suburb	55	31	13	1	99	(386)
--Growth Area	55	30	14	1	100	(411)
<u>Past Surveys</u>						
March 2000	60	26	14	1	101	(800)