



Air Pollution Control District  
San Luis Obispo County

**TO:** Board of Directors, Air Pollution Control District

**FROM:** Larry R. Allen, <sup>APCD</sup> Air Pollution Control Officer

**DATE:** January 28, 2015

**SUBJECT:** Report on Results of Public Opinion Survey on Air Quality and Agency Awareness

**SUMMARY**

The APCD Strategic Action Plan (SAP) was first adopted by your Board in 2004, updated in 2007 and most recently in 2012, to ensure District resources are appropriately prioritized and applied to programs and actions that produce results to support our mission, mandates and stakeholders. One goal of the SAP is to *“Enhance awareness of local air quality and engage the community in working to promote clean air.”* To support this goal, strategies and tactics were identified for implementation over a five-year period to increase public awareness on air quality issues throughout San Luis Obispo (SLO) County. In order to gain a better understanding of the knowledge and attitudes of SLO County residents, a survey was designed to determine the level of public understanding on local air quality issues. This staff report presents the results of the recently conducted Public Opinion Survey.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That your Board receive and file the information provided.

**DISCUSSION**

The APCD has a Strategic Action Plan that identifies top goals, objectives and implementation tactics to ensure resources are best utilized to carry out our mission and improve air quality throughout SLO County. The 2012 update to the Strategic Action Plan includes a specific goal to build public awareness and an engaged community to promote clean air. A statistically valid public opinion survey was identified as an effective means to gain a baseline understanding of residents’ current perceptions of air quality, as well as their personal motivation and willingness to engage in specific air quality protection activities. In addition, the APCD also sought to measure public awareness of the agency. Results of the survey will assist us in developing programs that best suit local constituent’s needs and modify existing programs to improve outreach effectiveness.

In November 2014, Opinion Studies was hired for their experience in developing and conducting quality, unbiased, statistically valid surveys throughout SLO County. The APCD

consolidated survey efforts with another government agency to reduce survey costs. A scientifically administered phone survey produced 400 interviews with residents countywide, with a 95% confidence level for data accuracy. Interviews were apportioned by population in the four main regions of the county (i.e., North County, San Luis Obispo, South County and North Beaches) as well as by county demographics based on U.S. Census data. The phone interviews averaged 14 minutes total, with the APCD questions averaging about 6.5 minutes to complete.

The Public Opinion Survey report provides detailed information on the responses from the phone survey, and evaluates the data on a sub-regional and countywide basis. The interview questions were grouped into four primary areas: 1) perception of local air quality, 2) motivation to preserve local air quality, 3) awareness of specific air quality issues, and 4) awareness of the APCD. The information below provides highlights of the survey results. The report and associated appendices can be found at [www.slcleanair.org/community/survey.php](http://www.slcleanair.org/community/survey.php)

**Perceptions and Ratings of Local Air Quality:** Three questions were asked to determine the respondent's rating: the importance of good air quality to the health and lifestyle of themselves and their family; their level of concern about protecting local air quality; and their level of concern regarding climate change. The key findings are listed below:

- Over half (53%) of residents countywide think that local air quality is 'very good,' and 90% 'good' or 'very good.'
  - Regional: North Beaches residents are more likely to rate the local air quality as 'very good,' and South County residents are more inclined to rate local air quality as 'fair' or 'poor.'
- About 80% of residents countywide believe air quality has stayed the same over time.
  - South County respondents have experienced the most change in air quality, with 10% saying it has improved and 18% saying air quality has worsened.
- Most residents countywide believe that good air quality is very important to their health and lifestyle.
  - On a 1-10 rating scale, about 90% of residents countywide believe that good air quality is of a high importance level (ratings 8-10). Over 60% of countywide respondents rated it at '10.'
- County residents are more concerned about protecting local air quality than they are about climate change.
  - Sixty percent expressed significant concern about protecting air quality, whereas less than half (44%) of all county residents expressed significant concern about climate change.
- The percentage of people who said they have 'no' concern for climate change far exceeds those who said they have 'no' concern for protecting air quality.
  - Regional: North County residents are consistently less concerned about both air quality and climate change issues than are residents of other regions in the county.
  - Demographic: College graduates express more concern about climate change than those who do not have a degree.

**Motivation to Reduce Impact on Local Air Quality and Take Action:** To better understand what local residents are willing to do to preserve and/or improve local air quality, a series of multi-part questions were asked to better ascertain what would motivate specific actions and which programs individuals would be more willing to support.

- The top motivators for over half of county residents to take action and reduce their personal impacts on air quality are: 1) noticing a significant decline in air quality; 2) financial incentives (e.g., cash back rewards, tax credits, lower energy bills); or 3) family member being diagnosed with a lung or heart condition.
- Buying locally grown produce and/or locally manufactured products and installing energy efficient home retrofits ranked as the top two actions people were willing to do to improve local air quality.
- Driving a fuel-efficient vehicle and encouraging friends and family to visit the area car free, showed the most potential for growth (ratio of *'very willing to do'* compared to *'already doing'*).

**Awareness of Air Pollution Issues in the County:** Two questions were asked to determine if individuals were aware of specific air pollution issues in the region.

- The majority of residents countywide (70%) are not aware of any air pollution issues in the county.
  - Regional: South County residents are far more inclined than all others to say they are aware of air quality issues. Forty-six percent of South County residents said there is a problem compared to only 20% of North County residents.
  - Demographic: People over 45, as well as homeowners and people with children are more inclined than their counter parts to say there are air quality issues.
- Of the residents who said they were aware of air quality issues, when asked what issues they were aware of, the dust and sand blowing from the Oceano dunes and the impacts of ATVs and RVs on the beach were the problems mentioned most often by respondents.

**Attitudes and Awareness Toward the APCD:** Final survey questions focused on the respondent's familiarity with the APCD, its operations and responsibilities.

- About one third of county residents are very or somewhat familiar with the APCD.
  - Regional: North County residents are slightly more familiar with the APCD than other regions, while San Luis Obispo residents are the least familiar (about half have never heard of the APCD).
  - Demographic: People who have college degrees and/or who own their own homes are more likely to be familiar with the APCD. People between 18 and 44 are more likely than other age groups to be unaware of the APCD.
- Countywide, about half of those who are familiar with the APCD have a favorable impression, while 20% have an unfavorable impression. One third have no opinion or impression.

Results from this public opinion study will be used to update the APCD's Outreach Plan that will be presented to your Board later in 2015. The Outreach Plan is a road map to guide the agency in the allocation of staff and funding resources for programs and events that increase awareness of air quality issues and promote clean air goals to the public we serve. Survey results will assist in strategic decisions to draw conclusions about the public's current understanding of local air quality issues and recommend changes in the APCD's Outreach Plan to strengthen the agency's efforts, identify key collaborations, and better utilize limited resources to conduct outreach efforts throughout SLO County.

#### **OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT**

To maximize resources, the APCD combined efforts with another government agency to share the cost of conducting the CountyTrak Survey with people currently residing in SLO County.

#### **FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Expenditures for the public opinion survey described above are within the funds allocated for this purpose by your Board as part of the annual budget adoption in July. There are no additional financial impacts of this item.