



Albuquerque Bernalillo County Water Authority

Albuquerque/Bernalillo
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2016 Customer Opinion Survey

The FY16 Goals and Objectives directed the Water Authority to survey its customers in order to assess the Water Authority's performance from the customer's viewpoint. The Water Authority contracted with Research and Polling Inc. to conduct the survey, analyze the data and present the results to the Board. The purpose of the study was to measure customers' satisfaction with the services the utility provides and the importance of various services and programs.

Survey Sample

A random sample of 500 residential customers and 100 commercial customers was interviewed by telephone. Residential customers were selected through the use of randomly generated list of cell phone numbers as well as a list of phone numbers provided by the Water Authority. Commercial customers were selected randomly from a list provided by the Water Authority. All interviews were conducted between January 27th and February 7th, 2016. A sample size of 500 at a 95% confidence level provides a maximum margin of error of approximately 4.4%.

Results

Similar to the 2014 study, the vast majority of residential (96%) and commercial (93%) customers are satisfied with the services they receive from the Water Authority overall. More specifically, over nine-in-ten residential and commercial customers are satisfied with the reliability of water to their homes and businesses and the reliability of wastewater drainage from their homes and businesses to the City sewer line.

Reliability and Quality of Water and Sewer Service

As stated above, the vast majority of residential and commercial customers are satisfied with the reliability of water to their homes and businesses as well as the reliability of wastewater drainage. More specifically, the majority of residential express satisfaction with the condition of water (60%) and sewer (65%) lines; however, approximately one-fifth expresses dissatisfaction. Further, the majority (63%) of residential customers express satisfaction with the effectiveness of the Water Authority to repair leaks and response time for restoration of service and the effectiveness of the Water Authority

to respond to overflows or backups (63%) and response time for restoration of service (58%); however, approximately one-in-ten express dissatisfaction. Over seven-in-ten residential customers (72%) say they are satisfied with effectiveness of the Water Authority to control odors from sewer lines or treatment facilities, while 10% of residential customers are dissatisfied. When it comes to the quality of drinking water, the majority (79%) of residential customers expresses satisfaction; however, 15% are dissatisfied with the quality of drinking water. Of note, results are similar among commercial customers for each of the above mentioned reliability and quality attributes.

Water Education And Conservation Programs

The majority of residential (73%) and commercial (66%) customers express satisfaction with education on water issues. Similarly, 69% of residential and 64% of commercial customers express satisfaction with water conservation programs. However, there has been a slight decline in the percentage of residential and commercial customers who say they are very satisfied with education on water issues since the 2014 study, as well as a decline in the percentage of residential customers who say they are very satisfied with the water conservation programs. When it comes to conservation, the vast majority of residential and commercial customers agree they follow the “Water by the Numbers” program, as well as agree that households would conserve more water if they had an easier way to monitor usage. Additionally, the vast majority of residential customers (61%) and commercial customers (68%) agree there should be strong financial penalties for people who use too much water; however, approximately one-third of residential and one-quarter of commercial customers disagree there should be strong financial penalties for people who use too much water.

Water Rates

Although the vast majority of residential (78%) and commercial (84%) customers agree that water and sewer services are a good value for the amount of money they pay, there has been a slight decline in customers’ perceptions regarding value since the previous study. The vast majority of residential and commercial customers also agree that because water is a scarce resource, water rates should be designed to reflect the value of water in our daily lives. However, customers are less apt to agree with statements that deal with increasing water rates to provide a reliable water supply for future generations, to cover the true costs to treat and deliver water to homes and businesses, and to encourage water conservation. It should also be noted that residents of lower socio-economic status are less likely to agree with each of the statements regarding rate increases.

Importance Of Water Related Programs And Services

Similar to previous studies, when asked to rate the importance of various water conservation and environmental issues, over nine-in-ten residential customers (94%) and commercial customers (96%) say providing a long-term water supply for future generations is important. Further, 94% of commercial customers place a high priority on investing in the repair and replacement of old water and sewer lines. Between approximately seven-in-ten and nine-in-ten residential customers also feel the following issues are important:

- Investing in the repair or replacement of water/sewer lines (86%)
- The quality of the treated water returned back to the river (83%)
- Reusing treated wastewater to irrigate public spaces (83%)
- Balancing population and economic growth with our water availability (79%)
- Balancing customer water demand with protection of habitat for wildlife and vegetation in the Rio Grande corridor (79%)
- Enforcing laws on water waste (77%)
- Making water available to attract and keep high-tech industries that offer good paying jobs (69%)

Over eight-in-ten commercial customers also feel the following issues are important:

- Balancing population and economic growth with our water availability (88%)
- The quality of the treated water returned back to the river (87%)
- Reusing treated wastewater to irrigate public spaces (85%)
- Enforcing laws on water waste (83%)
- Making water available to attract and keep high-tech industries that offer good paying jobs (81%)
- Balancing customer water demand with protection of habitat for wildlife and vegetation in the Rio Grande corridor (80%)

Billing Services

Consistent with previous studies, the vast majority of customers express satisfaction with bill payment options (87% residential, 83% commercial), understanding the bill format and water usage graph (83% residential, 88% commercial), and the accuracy of their water billing statements (82% residential, 86% commercial). However, it should be noted that, overall, satisfaction with billing services among residential and commercial customers has declined slightly from the 2014 study.

Customer Service Representatives

Among the 17% of residential and 20% of commercial customers who have contacted the Water Authority, the vast majority say they have spoken with an employee on the phone or in person. Sixty-nine percent of residential customers and 85% of commercial customers give a rating of good or excellent to the customer service representative they spoke to when contacting the Water Authority. More specifically, when it comes to the courtesy of the customer service representative, 80% of residential and 91% of commercial customers express satisfaction, while 66% of residential and 92% of commercial customers express satisfaction with the knowledge and ability of the representative to answer their questions or resolve issues. Further, 65% of residential and 78% of commercial customers express satisfaction with the wait time to speak to a customer service representative.

Climate Change

When it comes to customer agreement levels with various statements regarding climate change and the Water Authority, over nine-in-ten residential (91%) and commercial (95%) customers agree the Water Utility should plan and take the steps necessary to ensure that our community has safe, adequate water for the next ten to forty years. Nearly six-in-ten residential (59%) and commercial (58%) customers agree the impact of climate change on the water cycle will make it more difficult for the water utility to meet our community's water needs in the next ten to forty years; however, 26% of residential and 31% of commercial customers disagree. Further, the majority of residential (57%) and commercial (51%) customers agree future extreme weather events will negatively impact the water utility's ability to provide safe, healthy drinking water. It should be noted, however, that 24% of residential and 31% of commercial customers disagree future extreme weather events will negatively impact the water utility's ability to provide safe, healthy drinking water.

Summary

The vast majority of both residential and commercial customers place a great deal of importance on the Water Authority planning ahead to ensure a reliable water supply for the region's future. In fact, over 90% of customers agree the water utility should plan and take the necessary steps to ensure that our community has safe, adequate supplies of water for the next 10 to 40 years. Further, over nine-in-ten customers say it is important for the Water Authority to provide a long-term water supply for future generations. The survey demonstrates that customers feel it is important to maintain a

reliable system and plan for future needs. The Water Authority will need to continue to educate its customers on the costs associated with these improvements and enhancements.