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## **Social dimensions of private well testing: Why don't people test their well water?**

Delores Severtson, Barbara Liukkonen, and Ruth Kline-Robach

### Abstract Text:

In March 2007, 2600 surveys about well water testing were mailed to private well owners in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. Goals of the study are to learn what private well owners need to make informed decisions and to understand social factors that explain well-testing behavior. Natural resource and public health professionals may find it difficult to understand why private well owners choose not to participate in their programs or get their water tested, and this can affect the way testing clinics are implemented and promoted. This lack of understanding may also affect attitudes toward well owners.

A survey (43 questions) was designed to assess well water use and testing behavior, beliefs about water quality and safety, reasons for testing/not testing, preferences for getting information and willingness to pay. The survey process included a pre-survey letter, survey with a \$2 incentive and postage-paid envelope, and 2 reminder postcards. Our target response rate was 50%; 62% participated.

Preliminary findings include: regular programs increase program testing compared to one-time programs; those who test through programs were older and lived more years in their homes than those who tested privately; and ground water risk in the area was related to timely well testing but sensory qualities of water were not. Further, both ground water risk in the area and poor sensory quality were related to drinking less untreated water. Among those who don't test or tested long ago, over 40% said they plan to test but need information about how to test and what to test for. Participants overwhelmingly preferred to learn of an area groundwater problem via a postcard notice. Overall, websites were people's first choice for information about well water safety and quality, followed closely by the local health department, although preference varied across counties. Results suggest strategies for providing information to private well owners.

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### Impact Statement:

Ultimately the information gained through this survey research will improve private well testing programs and campaigns to increase well water testing. It will increase the number of wells tested and protect public health by reducing exposure to contaminants that present a health risk.