

NEW SURVEY RESULTS: POOR DRINKING WATER QUALITY IS MAJOR CONCERN AMONG LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS ACROSS TEXAS



POOR DRINKING WATER QUALITY IS MAJOR CONCERN AMONG LOW-INCOME POPULATIONS

A new Texas Water Trade analysis shows that Black and Hispanic populations living in border communities, as well as Metro Houston and the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex, are broadly dissatisfied with the quality of their drinking water. As a result, most are relying on bottled water as their primary drinking water source.

“The survey results make clear that too many Texas households, most of them people of color, are still being left behind on everyday access to safe and affordable drinking water,” said Sharlene Leurig, Chief Executive Officer of Texas Water Trade, a nonprofit group that commissioned the survey in collaboration with the University of Texas El Paso (UTEP). “Given the state’s extraordinary financial resources, we’ve got to do better.”

Leurig added, “While we’ve long known that millions of Texans do not have access to clean, affordable water, these survey results will help us pinpoint which communities and neighborhoods are facing the biggest challenges.”

In collaboration with the University of Texas at El Paso, more than 650 underserved households were surveyed on their water spending habits, water quality concerns and willingness to pay for dependable, safe water services.

The survey was funded as part of a grant from Texas-based Lyda Hill Philanthropies to help Texas Water Trade launch a water service that will provide clean, affordable drinking water to underserved communities in Texas. The service, Vida Water, plans to deploy and maintain onsite water treatment technologies for households and schools using a subscription payment system.

SURVEY SUMMARY

Among 650 households surveyed in 2022, the highest levels of concern were in rural unincorporated colonias in El Paso County and the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV), which have substandard public water systems or no water infrastructure at all. More than 60% of the respondents in these communities believe their drinking water is unsafe and many travel more than 10 miles to buy bottled water or other water alternatives.



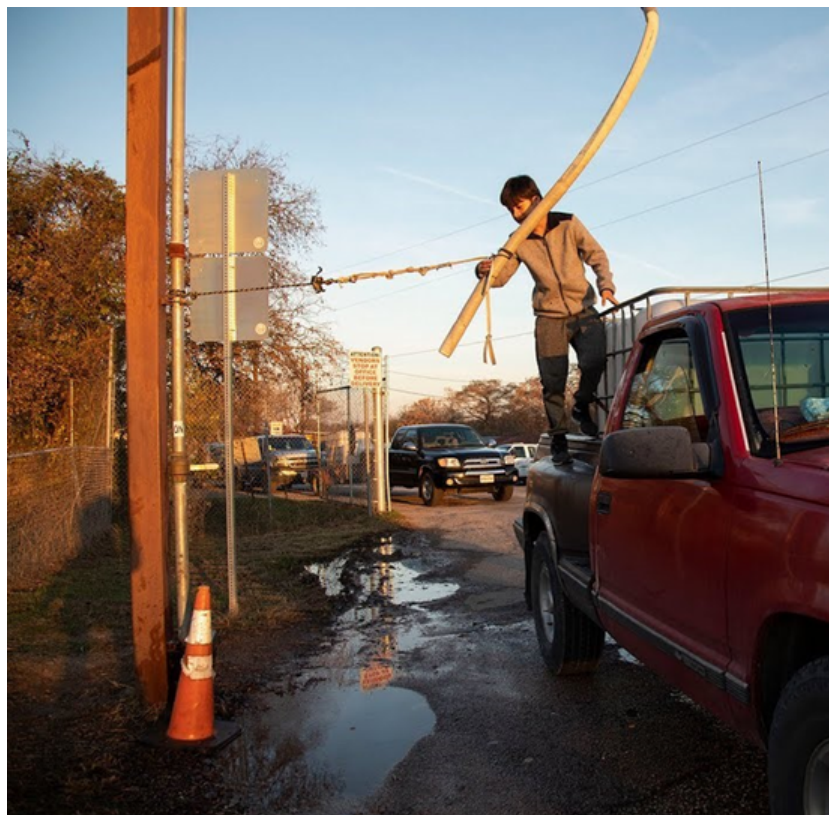
Underserved Communities Water Survey

UTEP trained and coordinated local community health organizations which surveyed low-income households in four underserved areas of Texas. Two-thirds of these households were connected to public water systems, while the rest having no water infrastructure, thus forcing them to rely on hauled water that is stored in large tanks for days or weeks before it is used. This practice creates a serious risk of water borne illnesses, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) (EPA, 2002).

SURVEY ADMINISTRATORS: LOCAL COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS

Thanks to our survey partners:

- Lower Rio Grande Valley Area Health Education Center
- Familias Triunfadoras (El Paso County)
- Healthbridge (DFW Metroplex)
- Community Care (Metro Houston)
- Coalition of Community Organizations (Metro Houston)



LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLD WATER ECONOMICS

BOTTLED WATER

- 57% of the households surveyed reported that they relied on bottled water as their primary source of drinking water
- Bottled water purchases cost \$37 per month on average, which is almost 2% of annual income for a household earning \$25,000 a year

TRUCKED WATER

- The average price for trucked water delivery was \$90
- The average reported frequency of trucked water delivery was every 3 weeks, with 1-8 days advance notice to schedule delivery
- The average cost per year was \$1,570 (\$131/month)
- On average, 5.6% of reported household income is spent on trucked water
- Some households spend up to 12% of income on water

ALL REGIONS RESPONDENTS

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



61%

disagree or strongly disagree their water is safe to drink

53%

disagree or strongly disagree they are happy with their water quality

56%

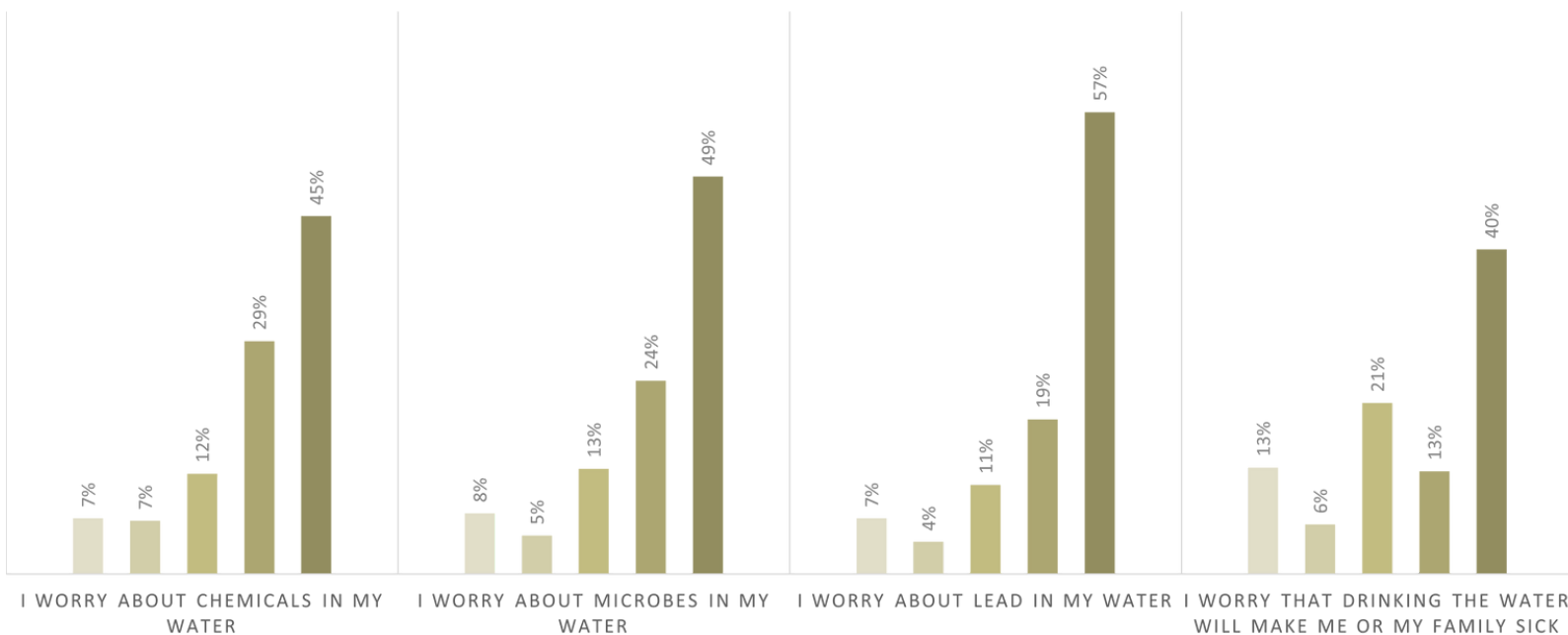
disagree or strongly disagree their water's taste is acceptable

43%

disagree or strongly disagree their water's smell is acceptable

ALL REGIONS RESPONDENTS

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



74%

agree or strongly agree that they worry about chemicals in their water

73%

agree or strongly agree that they worry about microbes in their water

76%

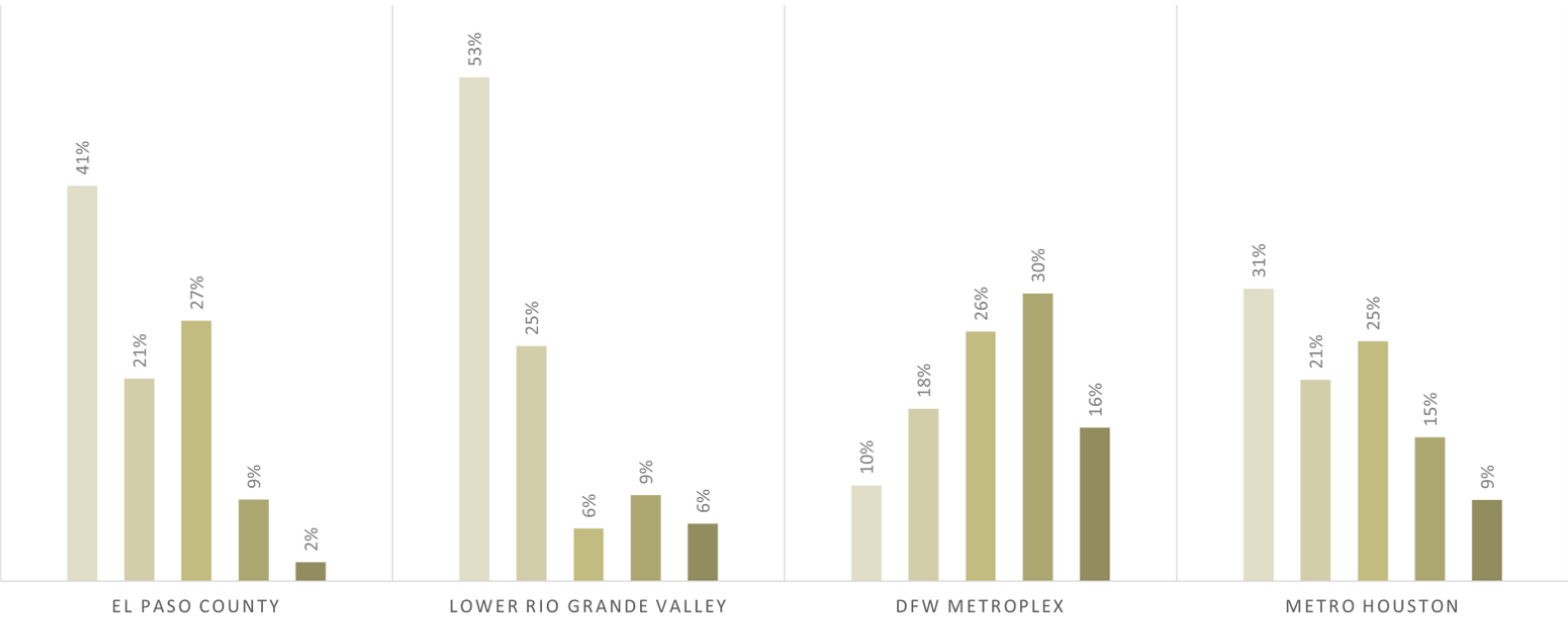
agree or strongly agree that they worry about lead in their water

53%

agree or strongly agree that they worry their water will make them or their family sick

MY WATER IS SAFE TO DRINK:

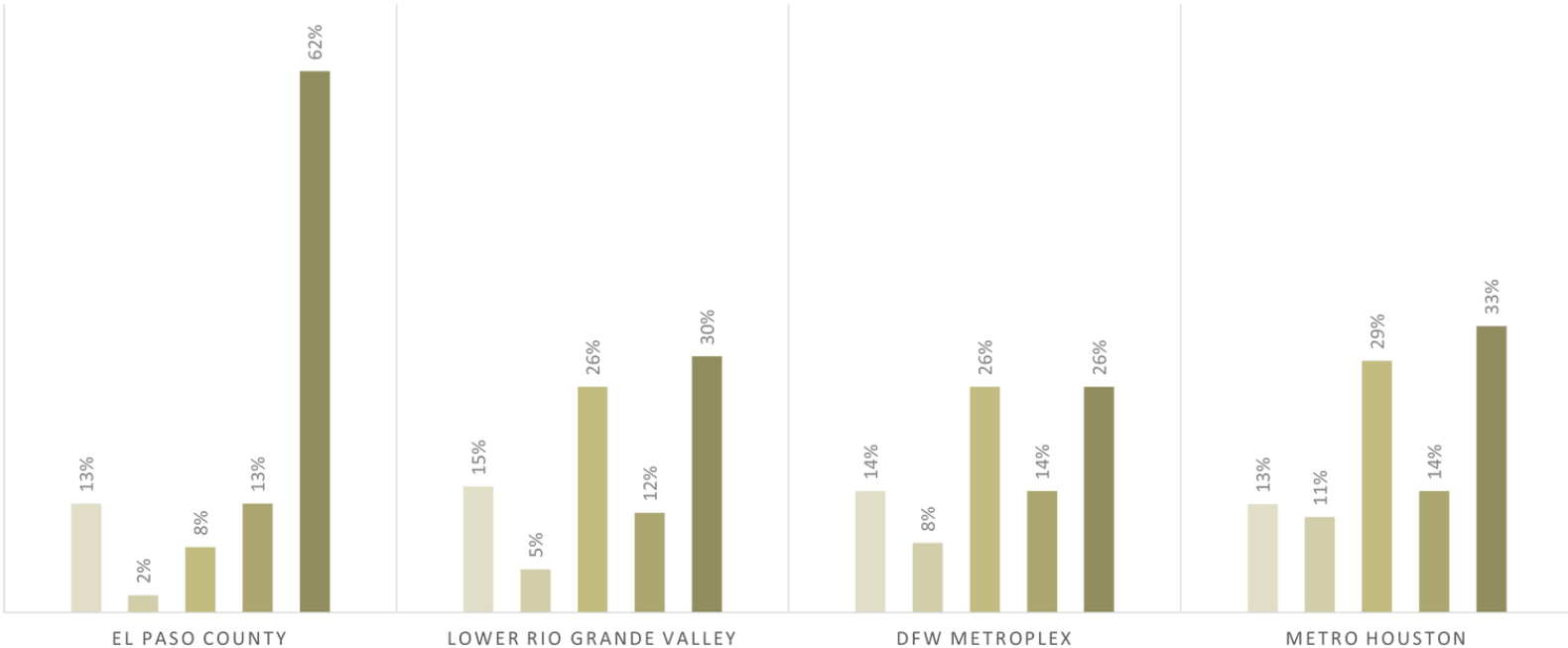
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



In general, municipal customers in urban areas have a much lower concern over the safety of their water.

I WORRY THAT DRINKING THE WATER WILL MAKE ME OR MY FAMILY SICK:

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree



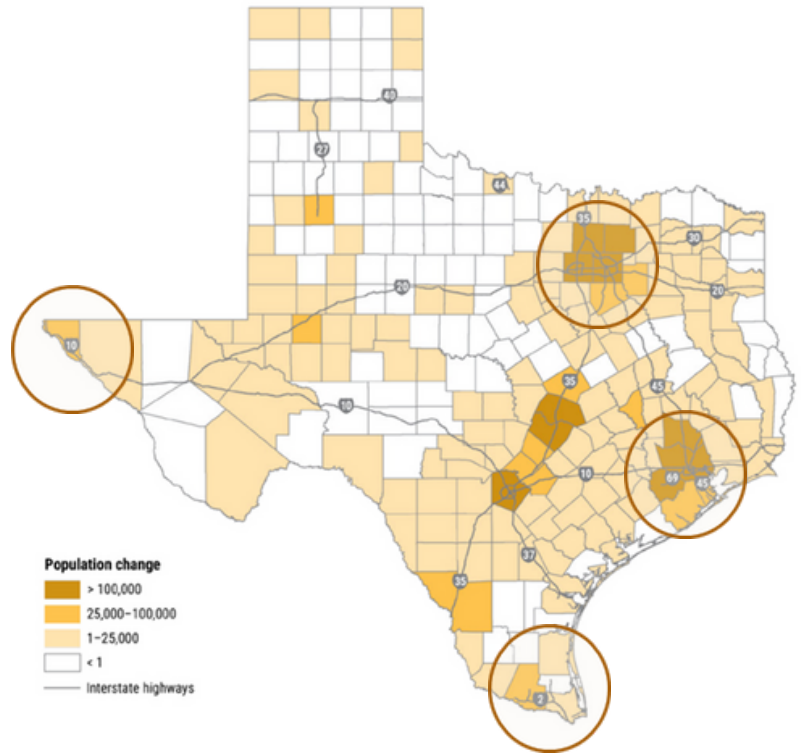
Sickness is a special concern for those on hauled water as their on-site water tank is at risk of both bacteria and over-chlorination.

SURVEY RESPONSES

Jim Drees, CEO of Vida Water, said the new survey results will help guide where Vida Water plans to provide point-of-use water treatment service in 2023.

“It’s pretty clear that the border communities, especially colonias, are facing some of the biggest challenges in terms of public health and the high costs of buying bottled water,” he said. “We plan to prioritize these underserved communities.”

Figure 4-2. Historical population change by county (2010–2018)



Ref: 2022 State Water Plan, Texas Water Development Board: SWP22-Water-For-Texas.pdf

TEXAS WATER TRADE'S RESPONSE

Under Our Clean Water for All Texans playbook, Texas Water Trade's influence will include:

- Providing technical advice and support to help strategic partners access funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, ensuring that communities whose safe water needs can be met through centralized water treatment solutions can do so
- Matchmaking at least three corporate commitments that support clean water access and availability for Texans that lack clean, safe drinking water today
- Coordinating with trusted community advocates and ambassadors in at least three regions in order to identify households, childcare facilities and schools most at risk from unsafe water
- Educating councils of government in priority regions on the clean water access gap in their communities and tools that could close the gap
- As sole owner of Vida Water, overseeing its launch and realization of public benefit goals

VIDA WATER'S RESPONSE

The service, Vida Water, is a newly formed Public Benefit Corporation that believes that safe drinking water is a universal right.

Vida Water plans to offer a monthly subscription service to deploy and maintain point of use water treatment systems to provide water safe to drink at a price below what Texans pay today for bottled water.