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CUSTOMER RESEARCH PROJECT REPORT WITH TRANSMITTAL NIROP FRIDLEY MN

1/13/1999

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

Metropolitan Council
Working for the Region, Planning for the Future

Environmental Services

January 13, 1999

Dear Industrial Customer:

In the fall of 1998, you received a copy of the results of the first two of four phases of MCES' 1998 Customer Research Project: a survey of city officials and staff completed in June 1998, and a survey of industrial users completed in September 1998.

Results of the final two phases of our Customer Research Project were recently published and are enclosed; a survey of the general public and a survey of government agencies.

I hope you will have an opportunity to review the conclusions and recommendations of all four phases of the research, and that you find the information useful. Our goal is to engage you in a meaningful discussion about protecting the regional environment and shaping our priorities and budget to deliver high-quality service. To that end, some recommendations are being implemented immediately and others will be the subject of additional discussions at our annual pre-budget customer meetings, which will begin in early spring.

Please let me know if you have any comments to share by calling (651)-602-1106. I can also be reached through E-mail at *helen.boyer@metc.state.mn.us*

Sincerely,

Helen Boyer

Helen Boyer
MCES Division Director

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services

Customer Research Project

• City Officials & Staff •
• Industrial Users •
• General Public •
• Other Government Agencies •

Overview of Customer Research Project

We're Listening

In the past few years, the responsibilities and challenges undertaken by Metropolitan Council Environmental Services (MCES) have become more complex than ever. Especially as we move to a new approach defined by watershed management, we're also developing new ways of relating to our customers and addressing their expectations.

Much of the ground work is already done. We're continuing to implement the Council's *Water Resources Policy Plan* and MCES's *Strategic Business Plan*. And we're committed to improving our responsiveness to the region as we conduct our two core businesses: water resources planning, and wastewater collection and treatment.

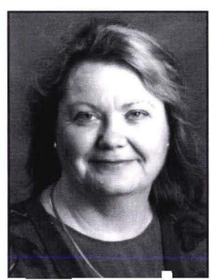
But we're striving for an even more thoughtful level of service. We recently completed an internal scorecard addressing customer service, and wanted to follow up with an external assessment to get our customers' point of view. The result was the Customer Research Project, the third phase of which is reported in this document. Phases I (City Officials & Staff)and II (Industrial Users) results have been sent to you previously. The fourth and final phase involved other government agencies. The results will be shared with you in the near future.

The project emerged from our commitment to measure our perceived level of service, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The general public's knowledge about MCES was canvassed through the omnibus survey conducted by the University of Minnesota Survey Center and is contained in this report. More specific to MCES, we engaged The Research Edge to conduct in-depth analysis with our major customer groups:
• City officials and staff
• Industrial users
• Other government agencies.

Our goal is to engage you in a meaningful discussion about protecting the regional environment and shaping our priorities and budget to deliver high-quality service. Please let us know if you have any comments to share.

Sincerely,

Helen Boyer
MCES Director



General Public Survey Objectives

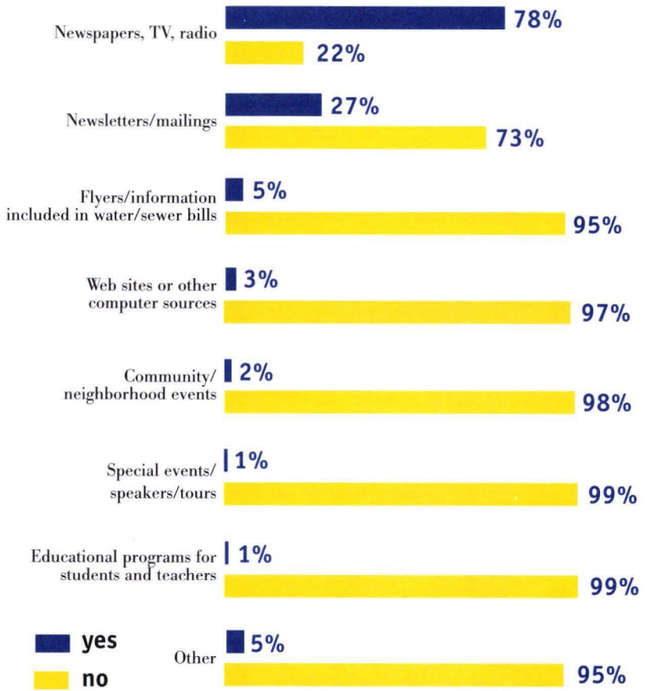
• Determine water resource priorities and regional needs

• Identify areas of public support for water quality improvements

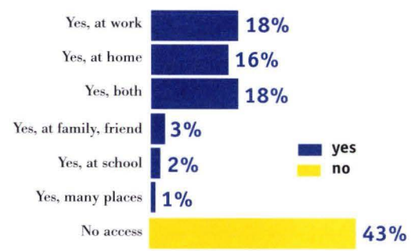
• Measure general awareness of MCES and current performance

• Identify communication opportunities

Preferred Information Sources on Water Quality and Environmental Issues



Access to Information on Internet



Conclusions and *Recommendations*

Respondents consider the media (newspapers, TV, radio) a reliable source of information on water quality and the environment, and the information they receive changes existing attitudes about one-third of the time. A majority of respondents (57%) have some access to the Internet.

The media should be considered an important vehicle for public education.

MCES should continue to strengthen its presence on the Internet.

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• Industrial Users •
• Other Government Agencies •

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More to Come

Continued Service/Future Surveys

This research provided excellent information and provides an opportunity to better serve the people of the region and improve communications with the general public.

Future surveys will be conducted to continue to gauge progress and needed change.

Metropolitan Council
Environmental Services

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The Results

Highlights of General Public Survey

Quality of Life and Water

• A majority of respondents consider air and water quality in the Twin Cities area above average compared to other cities; and the level of service provided for tax dollars to be average.

• Regarding the environment, respondents indicated the most important activity for regional government to be increased environmental protection, followed closely by public education.

• Respondents were more satisfied with the quality of their drinking water than with the water quality of area lakes and rivers.

Water Quality Improvements

• A majority of respondents can correctly identify the ultimate destination of wastewater and surface water runoff.

• Protection of lakes and rivers and reduction of agricultural runoff were named most often as the most important way to improve water quality.

• Respondents indicated strong support for use of a 'set aside' from residential sewer bills to fund activities to improve water quality and the addition of a water pollution charge to the cost of lawn fertilizers.

• Most respondents rated protection of the environment as a relatively more important consideration in treating wastewater, and costs relatively less important.

Perception of MCES

• Forty percent of respondents have some awareness of MCES. A majority of those believe MCES is doing a "good" or "very good" job.

Public Information & Communications

• Respondents rely heavily on the media (newspapers, TV, radio) and prefer it for information about water quality and the environment, although they believe the media does not change their attitude about water quality.

December 1998

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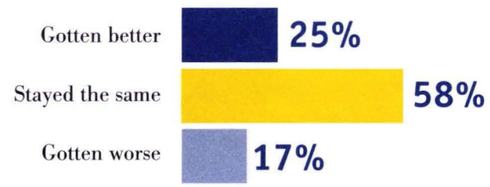
Quality of Life and Water

Quality of Life in the Twin Cities Over the Last Year or Two

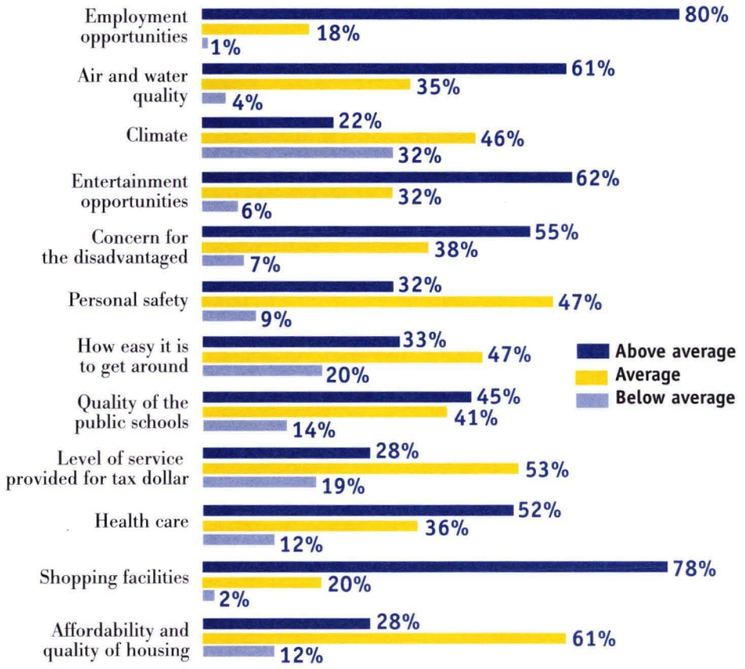


Conclusions and *Recommendations*

A majority of respondents consider air and water quality to be above average compared to other cities; and the level of service provided for tax dollars to be average.

Educational efforts stressing the link between a cleaner environment and improved quality of life should be considered, as should be improving the perceived value of services provided to the taxpayer.

Quality Characteristics of Twin Cities Compared to Other Cities



Perception of MCES

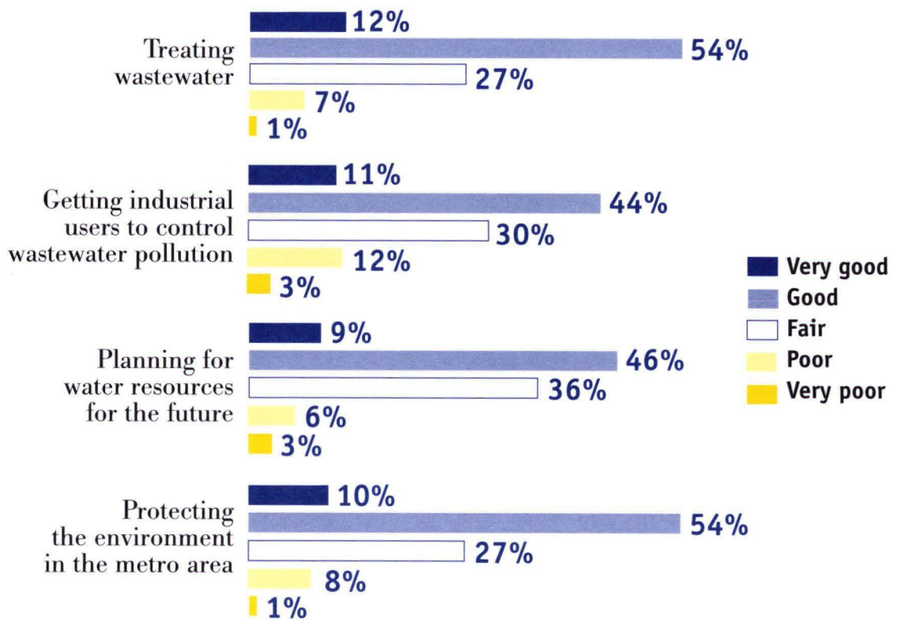
Knowledge of MCES

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

40% of respondents had some knowledge of MCES. Of those having knowledge, a majority considered MCES doing a 'good' or 'very good' job in four named areas of service.

Greater awareness of MCES and the services it provides should be pursued.

How is MCES Doing?



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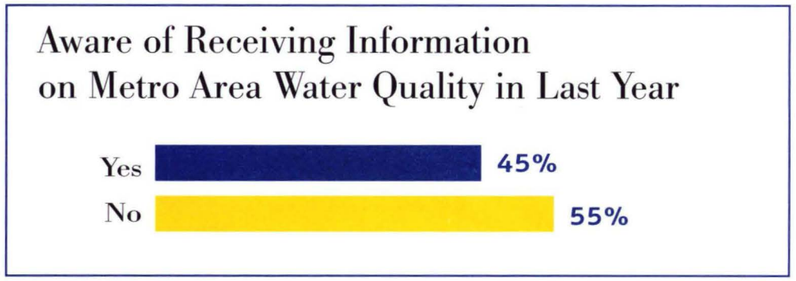
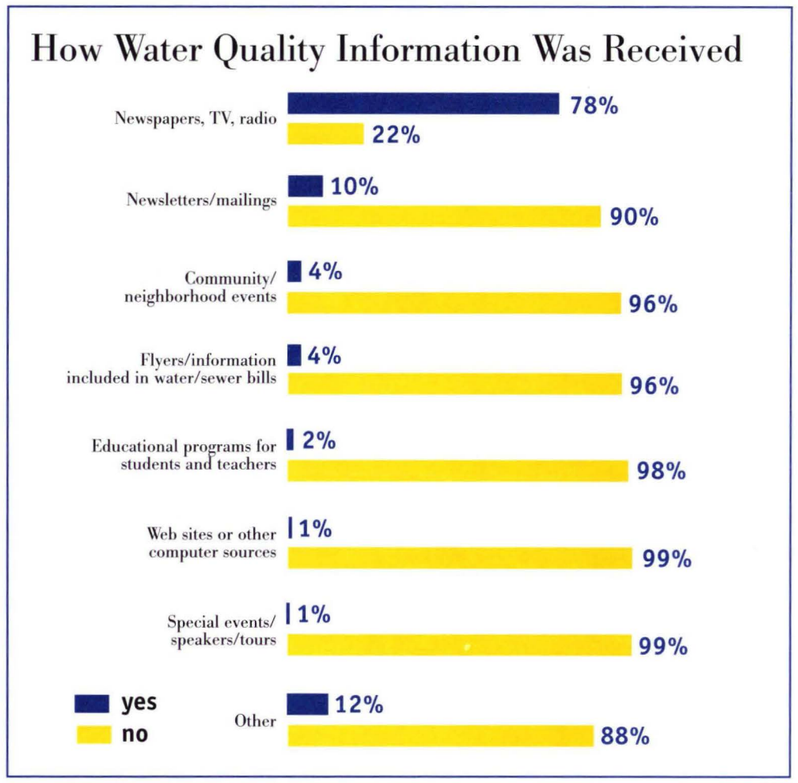
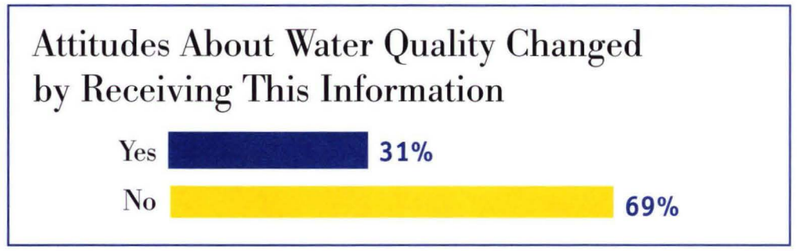
Public Information & Communications







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General Public
Respondent Profile

This report contains selections from the Quality of Life, Government, and Environment sections from the 1997 Twin Cities Area Survey (TCAS'97).

TCAS '97 was the fifteenth omnibus survey of adults, age 18 and over, who reside in the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area. Data collection was conducted from November 1997 to February 1998 by the Minnesota Center for Survey Research at the University of Minnesota.

A total of 803 telephone interviews were completed for TCAS '97. The overall response rate was 65%.

Since the individuals who participated in TCAS '97 were randomly selected from the population of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, the survey results can be generalized to the entire Twin Cities area.

There is a 95 % chance or better that if all households in the Twin Cities metropolitan area were surveyed, the results would not differ from the TCAS '97 findings by more than 3.5 percentage points.

Survey Sample Characteristics

Respondent county	Number	Percent
Anoka	82	10.2%
Carver	18	2.3%
Dakota	98	12.2%
Hennepin	368	45.8%
Ramsey	162	20.2%
Scott	21	2.6%
Washington	55	6.8%

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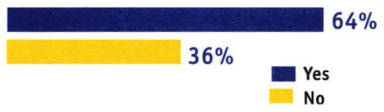
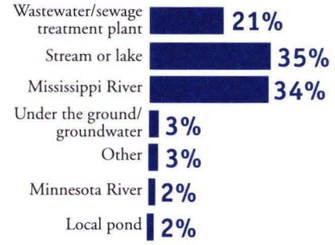
Water Quality Improvements

Destination of Stormwater

Aware of where stormwater goes after it leaves the catch basin?

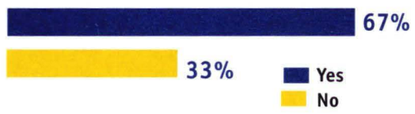


If yes, where does the water go?

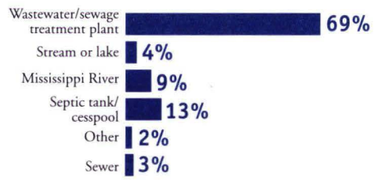


Destination of Household Wastewater

Aware of where household wastewater goes after it leaves the drain?

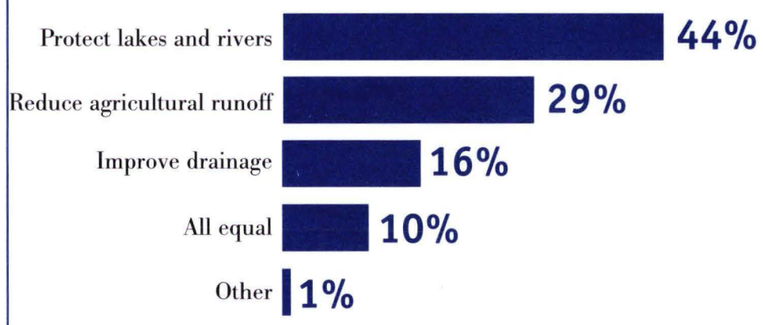


If yes, where does the water go?



Do you know the name or location of the plant?

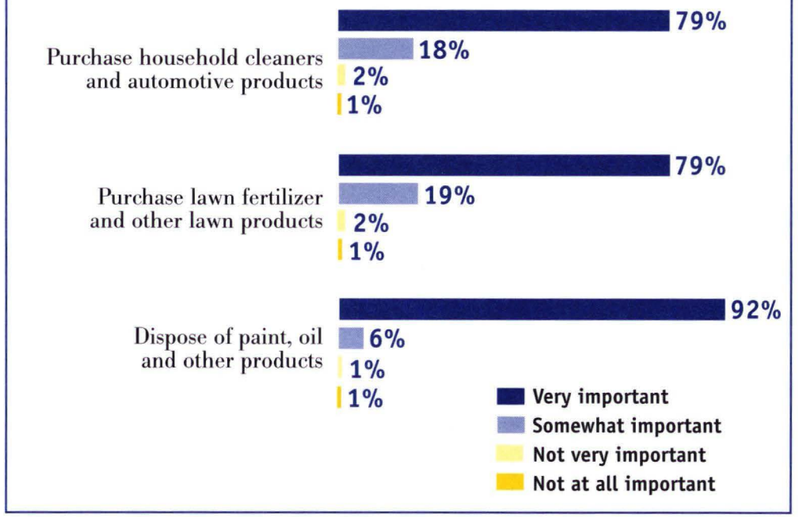
Most Important Way to Improve Water Quality



Use Sewer Bills to Improve Water Quality

Add Water Pollution Charge to Cost of Lawn Fertilizers

Perceived Importance, When Purchasing, of Effects of Products on Water Quality



Conclusions and *Recommendations*

A majority of respondents are aware of the ultimate destination of wastewater from homes and business and of surface water runoff.

Protection of lakes and rivers and reduction of agricultural runoff were named most often as the most important way to improve water quality.

A significant majority of respondents felt that money from sewer bills should be set aside to improve water quality, and that a water pollution charge should be added to the cost of lawn fertilizers.

As well, a majority of respondents (70%) felt it to be 'very important' to consider the effects of household products, lawn fertilizers and the disposal of paints and other household hazardous products when purchasing them.

Funding for new initiatives such as those designed to improve water quality, through non-traditional measures, has considerable public support and should be explored further.

Continue our commitment to nonpoint source pollution programs which contain elements such as planning, education, research and development, grants, monitoring and assessment.

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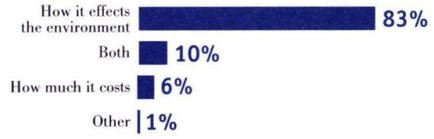
Water Quality Improvements continued

Note:
Questions on this page reflect public interest in decisions related to new solids processing equipment for the Metro Plant.

Most Important in Treating Wastewater

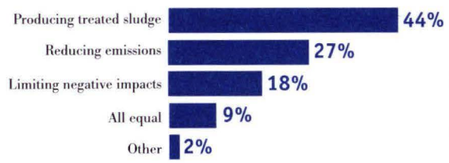


Aware of Negative Neighborhood Impact from Treating Wastewater

Aware of Problems to Air Quality in Treating Wastewater

Where Should Emphasis be Placed When Making Decisions about Wastewater Treatment

Most Important in Replacing Outdated Wastewater Treatment Equipment



Concerns about Uses of Treated Sludge

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

A majority (83%) of respondents felt that considering the environment was most important when treating wastewater compared to only six percent who felt that cost was most important.

When considering decisions on wastewater treatment, respondents were three times as likely to place preference on all residents than on just those who live close by to a treatment plant.

Both the environmental impacts and the costs of treating wastewater should be communicated to the general public on a regular basis, as should be the benefits of the reuse of treated sludge and wastewater treatment to the region.

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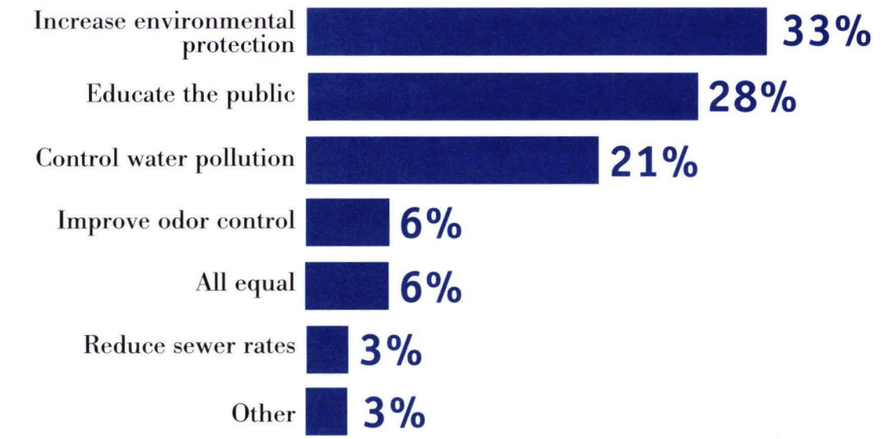
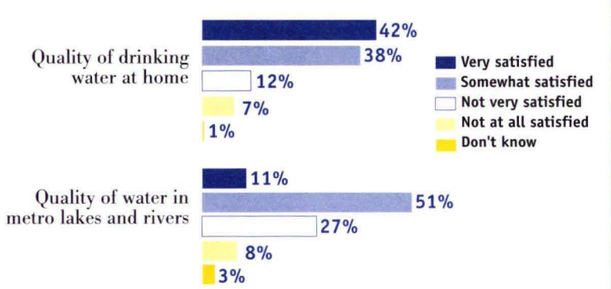
Most Important for Regional Government



Quality of Area Water



Conclusions and *Recommendations*

Regarding the environment, respondents indicated the most important activity for regional government to be increased environmental protection, followed by public education.

A majority of respondents were satisfied with both the quality of drinking water at home and the quality of water in metro lakes and rivers, although they were more satisfied with drinking water quality.

Build on the public's strong general awareness of environmental issues and introduce increasingly more detailed aspects of those issues through outreach and education.

Examine ways to expand environmental protection efforts as well as broaden public education learning opportunities regarding the actions the public can take.

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Overview of Customer Research Project

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Much of the ground work is already done. We're continuing to implement the Council's *Water Resources Policy Plan* and MCES's *Strategic Business Plan*. And we're committed to improving our responsiveness to the region as we conduct our two core businesses: water resources planning, and wastewater collection and treatment.

But we're striving for an even more thoughtful level of service. We recently completed an internal scorecard addressing customer service, and wanted to follow up with an external assessment to get our customers' point of view. The result was the Customer Research Project, the fourth phase of which is reported in this document. The results of Phases I (City Officials & Staff), II (Industrial Users) and III (General Public) have been previously reported.

The project emerged from our long-term commitment to measure our perceived level of service, both qualitatively and quantitatively. To start out, the general public's knowledge about MCES was canvassed through the omnibus survey conducted by the University of Minnesota Survey Center. More specific to MCES, we engaged The Research Edge to conduct in-depth analysis with our major customer groups:
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Sincerely,

Helen Boyer

Helen Boyer
MCES Director

Government Agencies Survey Objectives

• Help clarify roles of MCES and other agencies.

• Identify high priority and emerging issues.

• Identify opportunities for cooperation and coordination between agencies.

Success Factors for Joint Efforts

Identified Success Factors for Joint Projects

- Shared goals
- Common understanding of goals and value of participation
- Defined roles/responsibilities and levels of authority for project members
- Defined expectations and rules for the project
- Building or presence of long term relationship with project members
- Communications
- The project made a priority and the results supported
- A point person identified in each project member organization
- All stakeholders have part of the project
- End date set for project work
- All the necessary resources to the project assigned
- The project cost shared among members
- Project rules kept constant over time as much as possible
- The processes involved in projects streamlined/minimize red tape
- The 'glory' of successful projects shared with all participants
- Good 'chemistry' and personalities, and the ability to staff in a way that creates it

Areas With Collaborative Potential

Potential Area	Agency/Agencies
Water quality in St. Croix Valley	National Park Service
Planning/technical assistance for watershed districts/local governments	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources Army Corps of Engineers
Stormwater issues/maintenance	MN Department of Health MN Board of Water and Soil Resources MN Department of Natural Resources
Surface water issues	MN Department of Health
Non-point pollution	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources MN Department of Agriculture MN Department of Natural Resources
Conversion of Watershed Management Organizations to watershed districts	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources
Land use/resource issues	MN Board of Water and Soil Resources MN Department of Agriculture
Simplify joint regulatory work	MN Department of Agriculture
Urban sprawl/open spaces/ growth patterns	MN Department of Natural Resources MN Pollution Control Agency
Transportation	MN Pollution Control Agency
Water supply planning/research	MN Department of Natural Resources
Environmental indicators/biometrics	MN Department of Natural Resources MN Pollution Control Agency
Environmental education	MN Department of Natural Resources Watershed Management Organizations
Sustainable development	MN Department of Natural Resources
Water monitoring/grants	Watershed Management Organizations Watershed districts
Water quality research	Watershed districts
Water quality goals/standard setting	MN Pollution Control Agency
Customer research/public feedback	MN Pollution Control Agency
Sharing visions/planning/long term focus	MN Pollution Control Agency MN Board of Water and Soil Resources

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

State and national agencies were most positive about cooperative projects, due in large part to prior work with MCES and pressure by the general public to reduce competition and inefficiencies among agencies.

Success factors for joint efforts revolve around clear communications and mutual understanding and agreement of shared goals.

Of several potential areas for cooperation and coordination identified, priority areas to pursue appear to include areas of some overlap related to data gathering, public education, and planning.

Ensure joint efforts are based on a clear understanding of shared goals and the need to deliver concrete results.

Pursue cooperative projects from a systems approach and select those with high impact and the potential for measurable environmental outcomes and cost savings.

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Future Dialogue

The government survey concluded the final phase of MCES's 1998 research project. Unquestionably, our customers and government agencies are at the center of all we do. Therefore, it is imperative we stay connected to their emerging and changing needs. With that in mind, we will continue customer and government agency discussions.

Government Agency Discussion

In the near future, we plan to get together with all the government agencies we contacted and explore opportunities for further dialogue and involvement. One model for this is a recent MPCA and MCES forum, from which we've already developed a preliminary list of issues we want to partner on in the future.

Customer Discussion

A formalized survey method will be applied again in the year 2000. Our current customer strategy is to:

- Apply the information we learned from the 1998 survey to improve our services and products.
- Look for new ways to ask what our customers expect from us.
- Utilize our resources to provide the highest level of customer service.
- Measure the results of our efforts and test those results with our customers.
- Continually refine the process of collecting customer satisfaction data to ensure the quality of information we get back is timely and is targeted to changing customer groups.

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The Results

Highlights of Government Agencies Survey

Common Interest Areas

- Environmental issues of common interest included seven water resource topics in addition to land use and transportation impacts.
- Sustainable development is an emerging issue area for several agencies.
- Restructuring and organizational development along a geographic, cross-functional basis is an emerging trend.
- Most of the agencies interviewed are interested in cost effectiveness in response to expectations of the general public.

Interactions and Effective Relationships

- High ratings were given MCES in the areas of professionalism and service value; improvement opportunities exist in the areas of access and customer responsiveness.
- MCES results are generally viewed favorably. Mixed perceptions regarding both operational and planning functions reflect a need for greater awareness of MCES results and provide opportunities for improvement in some specifically identified areas.
- Nearly all respondents reported a positive experience with building relationships between their agency and MCES. MCES is viewed as a partner by the majority of interviewed national and state agencies; an opportunity exists to improve relations with watershed management organizations and districts.
- Suggestions to enhance partnership results included streamlining bureaucracy, increasing efficiencies, focusing on high-leverage activities and measurable outcomes, listening to the diverse community and being more customer-focused.

Success Factors For Joint Efforts

- Success factors revolve around clear communications and mutual understanding and agreement of shared goals.
- Several potential areas for cooperation and coordination were identified; priority areas to pursue appear to include areas of overlap related to data gathering, public education, and planning.
- Outcome-based reporting and use of a coordinated, systems approach provide a basis for effective, cooperative efforts.

December 1998

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services

Customer Research Project

• Other Government Agencies •
• General Public •
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Common Interest Areas

The natural environment inherently crosses political boundaries. This reality creates an opportunity for government agencies to work together, as reflected in the table to the right which lists areas of common interest with MCES.

Respondents were asked about new initiatives or directions they are pursuing. In addition to comments received related to the environmental issues contained in the table, topics noted included agency reorganizations, sustainable development, and cost efficiencies.

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

Agencies interviewed identified a common interest with MCES within nine broad areas. Coordination level varies across agencies. Water monitoring was the most frequently mentioned common interest.

Among the new directions reported, agency reorganizations along geographic lines provide the biggest potential impact. A shifting emphasis from an activity-based focus to an outcome-driven process is beginning to emerge among many of the agencies interviewed.

Define roles and responsibilities through an information sharing process. Use water monitoring as a discussion starting point. Promote a more coordinated effort on water and other environmental issues.

Initiate contact with reorganized agencies to ensure MCES maintains appropriate contacts and understands the changed organizations.

Perceived Areas of Common Interest with MCES

Agency	Agency Detail
Surface water quality	
National Park Service	St. Croix basin; standards
Army Corps of Engineers	Wetlands; Mississippi river
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	Wetlands
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	Agricultural chemicals
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Phosphorus loading; stormwater
Watershed Management Organizations/ Watershed Districts	Lake usage impact; discharges into Mississippi
Water monitoring	
Army Corps of Engineers	River sampling/data sharing
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	Stream monitoring
Watershed Management Organizations and Watershed Districts	Citizens lake program; grants; access to lab services
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Monitoring programs
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	Assist local governments
Wastewater treatment	
Army Corps of Engineers	Plant construction
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	By-product liming materials
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Regulator of plants/ permits
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Phosphorus impact
Groundwater quality	
Minnesota Department of Health	Flow modeling; monitoring drinking water/well protection
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources and Watershed Management Organizations and Watershed Districts	Pollution prevention
Nonpoint pollution	
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	Program funding; standards
Minnesota Department of Families, Children & Learning	Public education
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	Urban/rural pesticide and nutrient loading
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Prevention

Perceived Areas of Common Interest with MCES continued

Agency	Agency Detail
Planning	
Army Corps of Engineers	Water quality planning coalition
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Regional solutions
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	Review of agency plans
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Water supply planning
Watershed Management Organizations and Watershed Districts	Plans reviewed by MCES
Prevention education	
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	Urban/rural nonpoint
Minnesota Department of Families, Children & Learning	Schools as tool in public education
Watershed Management Organizations and Watershed Districts	Resident education
Land use/urban sprawl	
Minnesota Department of Health	Impact on water supply
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	Integration of land use/water quality
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	Impact on animal habitats
Army Corps of Engineers	Rehabilitation of Mississippi river habitats
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Impact on air emissions/quality
Watershed Management Organizations	Impact on water quality
Transportation	
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	Urban sprawl/ air quality

Interactions and Effective Relationships

Respondents rated MCES effective in the areas of professionalism and service value and less effective in the areas of access and customer responsiveness.

As in prior studies with cities and industrial customers, awareness plays a large role in an evaluation. Awareness levels of MCES programs ranged from 20-65%. Some functions such as wastewater treatment, water monitoring, laboratory analysis, and water quality grants were both known and perceived as relatively effective. Review of plans and planning received mixed evaluations. Other functions were not well known and received mixed evaluations.

Biennial reports and newsletters such as *Council Directions* were the best remembered written communications from MCES by those responding for their agencies. When asked for suggestions to improve information sharing, the responses focused on sharing data and program goals and results.

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

Overall, MCES has a positive image with most agencies interviewed. Improvement opportunities exist in the areas of access and responsiveness to agency inquiries, increasing awareness of MCES's less well known functions and program results, and improving the perceived effectiveness of various aspects of planning.

Promote availability of MCES's three watershed coordinators to facilitate access and address issues. Initiate contacts with agencies to ensure staff know who MCES's contact persons are. Review and update mailing lists. Evaluate appropriateness of current publications as tools for interagency communications.

Provide forums for collaborative development of regional environmental and water policies and plans and for issue identification and resolution. Work with Council Community Development Division staff to improve process for review of local comprehensive plans.

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• General Public •
• City Officials & Staff •
• Industrial Users •

Interactions and Effective Relationships continued

Prior Experience Working with MCES

Participants were asked what has worked well in prior contacts with MCES. Nearly all respondents reported a positive experience with building relationships between MCES and their agencies. Among interviewees with little contact with MCES, the tone was generally positive.

Some typical positive comments included:

"they are part of the team"
"trying to be proactive"
"good listeners"
" responsive....care about the issues"
" good results"
" No controversy between us"
"helpful in program development input"
"active participant in coop efforts"
"good relationship"
"communication is one of their strengths."

Prior Difficulties Working with MCES

When asked about prior difficulties in working with MCES, the majority of reported problems were about access and responsiveness.

Typical comments included:

"hard to get responses or reach staff"
"not enough proactive outreach – more would be useful"
"verbal commitments, but not enough action"
"need to think longer term"
"some competitiveness"
being "invited to provide input late in a project or process"
"bureaucratic delays -- red tape"
difficult to "sort out who does what"

Suggestions to Enhance Interactions and Results

When asked for suggestions for MCES to enhance interactions and results, respondents mentioned the following:

• develop a more proactive approach, in advance of complaints;
• focus on high priority or high leverage points;
• drive the process based on outcomes, not activities;
• listen to the community and environmental groups more so work can be customer focused – let the people decide what priorities exist;
• communicate openly and honestly and share good and bad information to build the trust and confidence of other parties;
• develop a better understanding of each other, a common view of each other;
• identify one person as the entry point into MCES;
• share MCES structure, initiatives with other agency in a joint meeting;
• streamline bureaucracy to reduce time spent on tasks;
• provide assistance with planning, testing new technology, lab services.

Conclusions and *Recommendations*

MCES is viewed as a partner by a majority of interviewed national and state agencies. An opportunity exists to improve relations with watershed management organizations and districts.

Suggestions to enhance partnering include streamlining bureaucracy, increasing efficiencies, being more customer-focused, and focusing on high-leverage activities and measurable outcomes.

Pursue joint efforts with interested agencies, especially those efforts with high-leverage potential.

Utilize MCES watershed coordinators and Board of Water and Soil Resources to facilitate improved relations with watershed management organizations and districts.

Other Government Agencies
Respondent Profile

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services
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• City Officials & Staff •
• Industrial Users •

Agencies in Survey

Local
Watershed Districts

Watershed Management Organizations

State
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources

Minnesota Department of Agriculture

Minnesota Department of Families, Children & Learning

Minnesota Department of Health

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency

National
Army Corps of Engineers

National Park Service

In-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each agency to provide a broad sampling of the various government perspectives. An interview guide was developed which was sent to the respondent agencies to help familiarize the respondents with the content areas of discussion prior to the interviews. In addition, respondents were asked to complete an evaluation form which was returned at the time of the interviews. Twenty five interviews were conducted between July 2 through August 18, 1998 with twenty seven respondents from ten state, local and national agencies.

The major focus for the survey centered on asking questions related to areas of common interest and a discussing new initiatives or a change in focus, asking respondents to describe their current relationship with MCES, and discussing success factors for joint efforts and the potential for cooperative ventures.

Survey Sample Characteristics

Agency Name	Number of Respondents
Army Corps of Engineers	2
Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources	2
Minnesota Department of Agriculture	3
Minnesota Department of Families, Children & Learning	1
Minnesota Department of Health	1
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources	4
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency	5
National Park Service	1
Watershed Districts	4
Watershed Management Organizations	4
Total number of respondents	27