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Milwaukee Survey Used to Design Pollution Prevention Program

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The public needs to be educated about nonpoint source pollution!" cries the Urban Stormwater Manager. "Videos are hot — let's do a video, debut it at a public meeting, and then put a dozen copies in the library for people to check out."

How effective is this approach? Not very, according to a recent survey of over 3,000 residents in the lower Milwaukee River watershed. Researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Environmental Resources Center report that people have a willingness to learn and make personal lifestyle changes to help the water environment, but they much prefer a passive approach to the education process (Nowak *et al.*, 1990). Television news reports, newspaper articles, and a community newsletter delivered to the home were cited as the best ways to get people to take notice of water resource issues (Figure 1).

Traditionally, citizens have been considered the weak link in nonpoint source pollution prevention pro-

grams. In spite of intensive education efforts, some unenlightened residents continue to exacerbate local water quality problems by overusing chemical fertilizers, improperly dumping yard wastes, exposing soil to erosion, and allowing litter and pet wastes to move off their property.

Even more striking is the public's ignorance about new advances in stormwater management that can result in better local stream and wetland protection. Consequently, local opportunities to install innovative stormwater practices or stormwater retrofits routinely pass by planning and zoning boards without much public comment or involvement. Is it that people are uninterested? ... uncaring? ... Or are they just not properly plugged into the pollution prevention process?

"The underlying goal of the Milwaukee River Program survey," says Carolyn Johnson, Urban Water Quality Educator for University of Wisconsin Exten-

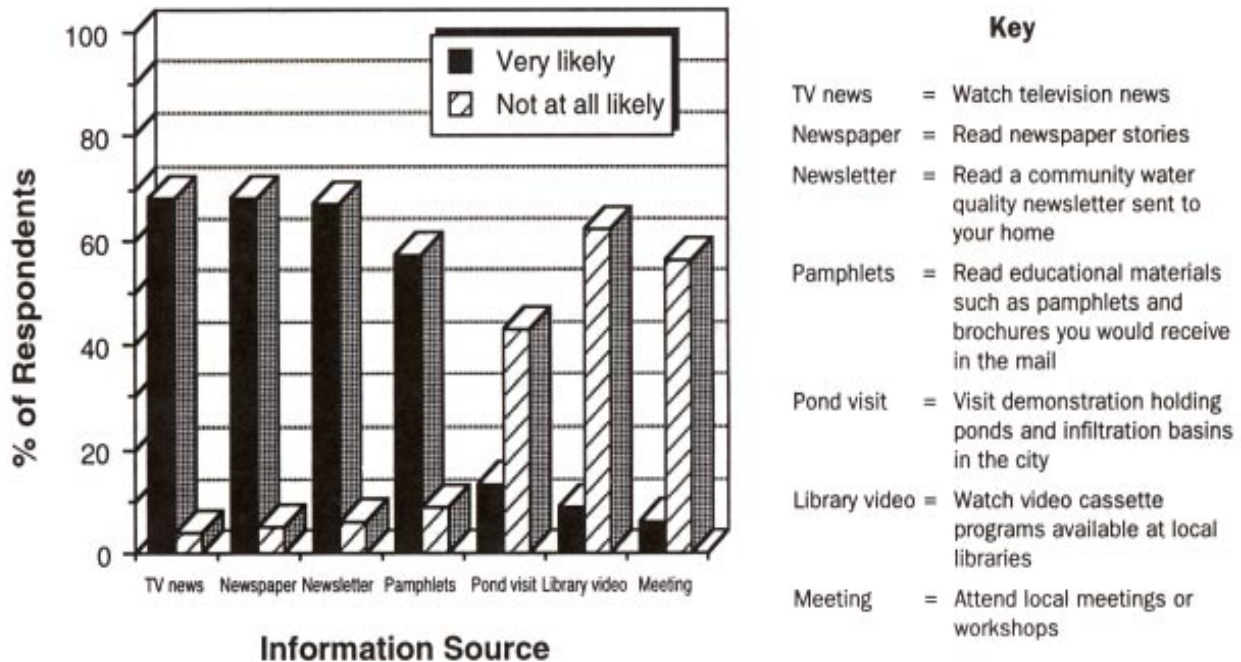


Figure 1: Comparative Effectiveness of Different Media in Engaging the Public in Milwaukee, WI