



Filtration Education

Many Americans use water filtration devices in their homes—but are they using the right filter for their local water quality? That is what NSF Intl. set out to discover with its 2013 Water Quality Survey, which posed questions on water filter use and water quality knowledge to 2,025 adults this summer. *Water Quality Products* Managing Editor Kate Cline recently spoke with Cheryl Luptowski, public information officer for NSF, about some of the survey's more surprising results.

Kate Cline: What did the survey reveal about Americans' knowledge of water quality and filtration products?

Cheryl Luptowski: First, we found out that, at least in our survey, 44% of homes/families had water filters, but that only about 17% of people—and this was one of the surprising statistics, given the prevalence of water quality reports today—are actually buying a filter based on trying to get rid of a certain contaminant.

We found that a lot of people got a filter because they didn't like the taste or odor of their tap water—that was right around 17%. But the largest group of consumers—35%—are just using the filter that was in the house when they moved in. Whether that was a filter in the refrigerator or underneath the sink, they just decided, well, it's here; we're just going to continue to use it—even though they may not have known what capabilities that system had and whether it really was doing anything to protect their families.

Cline: Do you think that Americans have become more knowledgeable about water quality issues over the years?

Luptowski: I would say they have become more knowledgeable. I've been handling the consumer affairs office for NSF for 14 years, so I would definitely say yes, compared with how it was in 1999 when I first started here. I think one of the main reasons is that it's

easier to find out what's in your water today. We have water quality reports; we have home test kits. Even if you have a private well—at least here in my home state of Michigan—you can't buy a home that has one without the seller having to do a certain amount of testing. They have to test for things like bacteria and nitrates, and [in] some counties that have arsenic issues, they have to test for arsenic.

I think that, to a certain extent, it's the regulators who have helped this issue. But the information is just more readily available to us, either online or in the annual water quality reports that come out.

Cline: Were there any other surprising data from the survey?

Luptowski: Because I deal with the consumers and answering all of the questions they have, one thing I found pleasantly surprising was that three out of four consumers said that they are aware that they need to change their filters and that they followed the manufacturer's instructions for changing them. That's always one of our fears: that when we're verifying a product, if we're certifying that it's effective for a certain service cycle, that consumers are not realizing that there is a stated service cycle for a reason for these products.

Another was why people are looking for water filters. We talked about taste and odor issues, but also, going back

to my experience here in the consumer affairs office, the major reason that I see people looking for filters is because of special health concerns. People will contact us because someone in the family has a compromised immune system—somebody going through cancer treatment or an elderly relative who has moved into the home. They'll see those annual water quality reports, and they'll see that statement about *Cryptosporidium*. That will make them question their water quality, so we get a lot of calls about *Cryptosporidium*.

The other major thing that people call about—and this is the No. 1 contaminant for the past three years that I've been tracking this—is concern about lead in drinking water. This comes, to a certain extent, from the annual water quality reports, but also, I think it's the younger people today, the parents. I see this as the generations come down—because they're more knowledgeable about water quality, they're questioning things. So we're seeing a lot of questions about lead in drinking water. *wqp*

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