

March 12, 2008

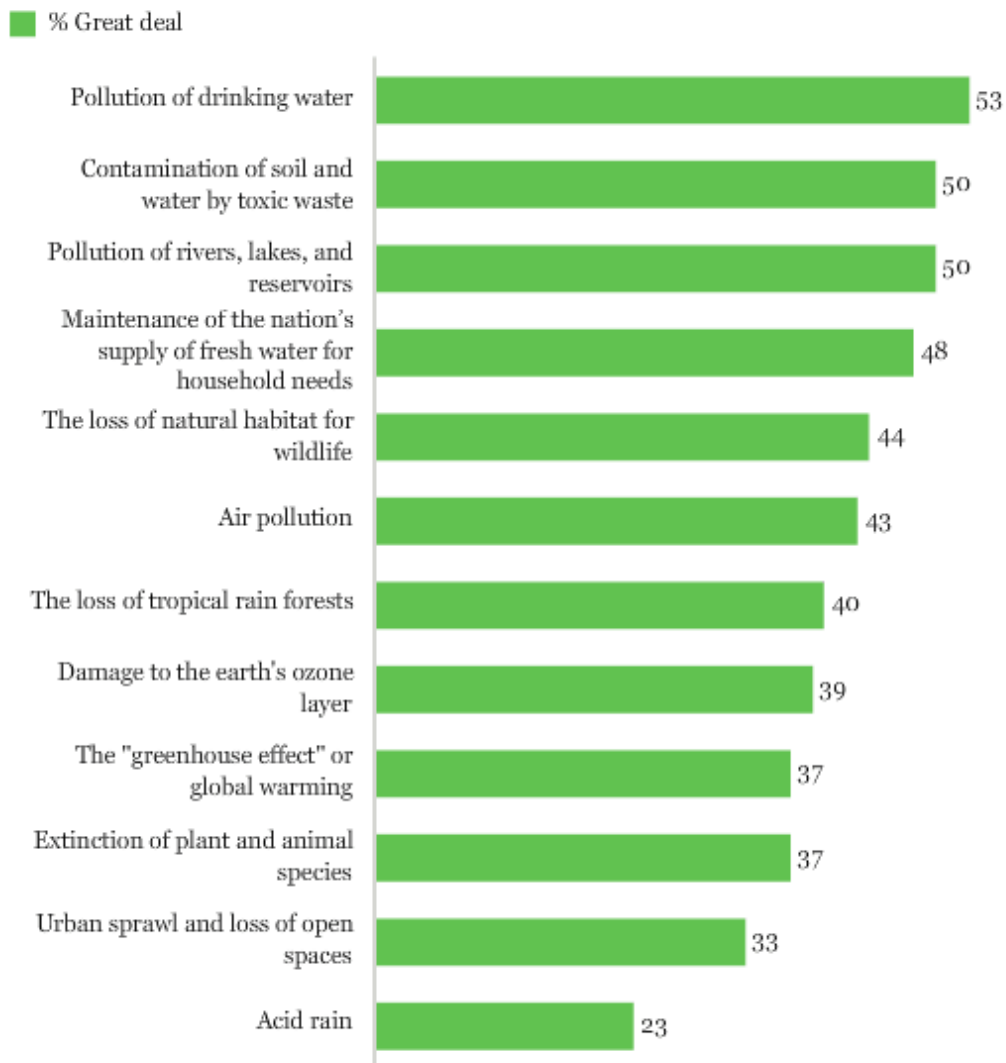
Polluted Drinking Water Was No. 1 Concern Before AP Report

Global warming way down the list

by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ -- When Americans are asked to rate their level of worry about each of 12 environmental concerns, their top four concerns relate to water quality, with pollution of drinking water the top overall concern.

I'm going to read you a list of environmental problems. As I read each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or not at all.



March 6-9, 2008, Gallup Poll

GALLUP POLL

Gallup's annual Environment survey was conducted March 6-9, just before a widely publicized Associated Press investigation reported that drinking water is not necessarily as pure as people think. While it is safe to drink, the report stated that drinking water in a number of major U.S. cities has been found to contain trace elements of pharmaceutical drugs. Thus, the report was released at a time when concern about drinking water was already at a relatively high level.

Prior to the release of the AP story, Gallup found no notable increase over the past 12 months in concern on any of the water-related items. In fact, for all 10 of the environmental items asked in both 2007 and 2008, the percentage who report worrying "a great deal" about the problem is lower now.

Ironically, the largest decline in reported worry was with respect to the safety of drinking water.

I'm going to read you a list of environmental problems. As I read each one, please tell me if you personally worry about this problem a great deal, a fair amount, only a little, or not at all.

	% Great deal, 2007	% Great deal, 2008	Change (pct. pts.)
Pollution of drinking water	58	53	-5
Pollution of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs	53	50	-3
Contamination of soil and water by toxic waste	52	50	-2
Maintenance of the nation's supply of fresh water for household needs	51	48	-3
Air pollution	46	43	-3
The loss of tropical rain forests	43	40	-3
Damage to the earth's ozone layer	43	39	-4
Extinction of plant and animal species	39	37	-2
The "greenhouse effect" or global warming	41	37	-4
Acid rain	25	23	-2

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The rank-ordering of the items, with water-related issues including polluted drinking water, polluted bodies of water, maintenance of the nation's water supply, and contamination of water and soil, is typical of what Gallup has found since 1989, when it first measured concern about various environmental problems. The list includes global warming -- arguably the most discussed environmental issue these days. Water quality is probably a more immediate concern to Americans, while global warming may seem like a somewhat more remote issue.

The accompanying table shows the top overall concern each time Gallup has asked Americans to rate their level of worry about environmental threats. Polluted drinking water has topped the list every time it has been included. When it hasn't been asked, as in May 1989, another concern about water safety finished first.

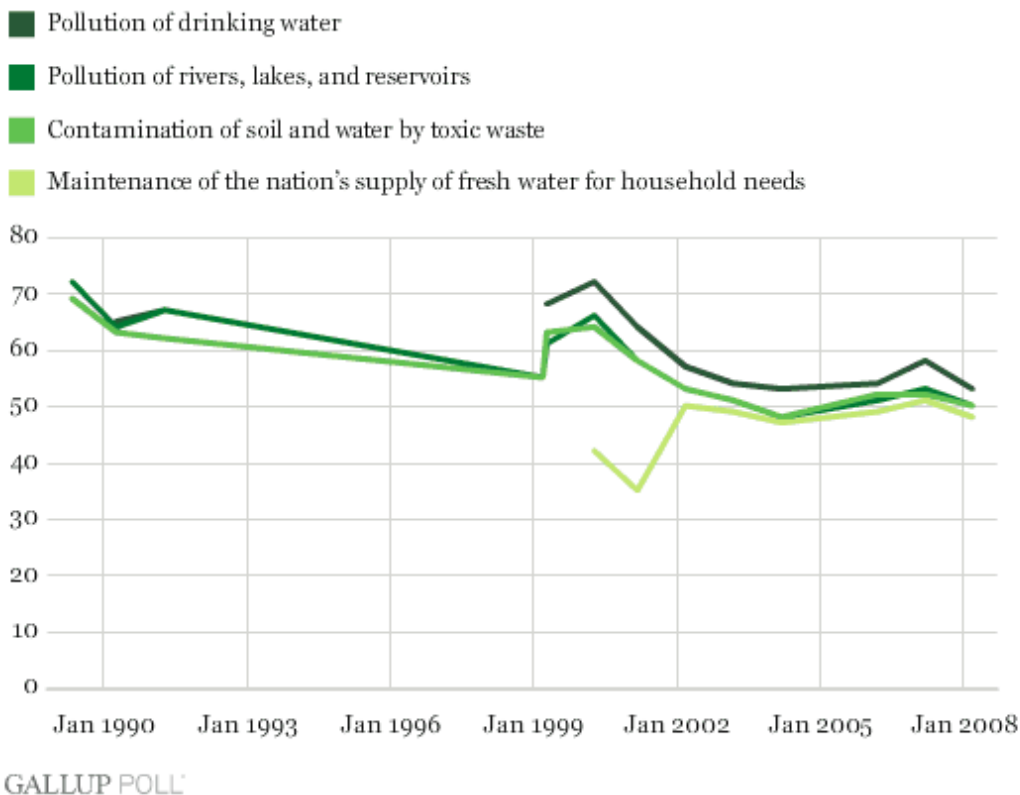
Top Environmental Concern, 1989-2008 Gallup Polls

	Top concern	% Worried a great deal
2008 Mar 6-9	Pollution of drinking water	53
2007 Mar 11-14	Pollution of drinking water	58
2006 Mar 13-16	Pollution of drinking water	54
2004 Mar 8-11	Pollution of drinking water	53
2003 Mar 3-5	Pollution of drinking water	54
2002 Mar 4-7	Pollution of drinking water	57
2001 Mar 5-7	Pollution of drinking water	64
2000 Apr 3-9	Pollution of drinking water	72
1999 Apr 13-14	Pollution of drinking water	68
1991 Apr 11-14	Pollution of drinking water / Pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs	67
1990 Apr 5-8	Pollution of drinking water	65
1989 May 4-7	Pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs	72

GALLUP POLL

Even so, concerns about water safety are generally reduced now compared to what they were in the late 1980s and 1990s, and down from where they were in 2000, the first year of Gallup's annual Environment poll. The one exception to that general pattern is maintaining the nation's supply of fresh water for household needs, concern about which increased in 2002 and has been steady since then.

*Percentage Worried a Great Deal About Water-Related Environmental Concerns,
1989-2008 Gallup Polls*



Implications

Over the years, Americans have shown greater concern about environmental problems that touch on water than on any other environmental issue. The attention the AP report has generated makes sense in this light. It is unclear at this early stage whether Americans' concerns will increase following this report, and whether that might lead to public pressure to try to make drinking water purer.

Survey Methods

Results are based on telephone interviews with 1,012 national adults, aged 18 and older, conducted March 6-9, 2008. For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is ± 3 percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on land-line telephones (for respondents with a land-line telephone) and cellular phones (for respondents who are cell-phone only).

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

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