

UNDERSTANDING AIR QUALITY ISSUES IN TEXAS: PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND EXPERT OPINION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Texas Transportation Institute
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(formerly the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission)

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Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy
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In an effort to better target a statewide campaign to raise public awareness of air quality issues, information was gathered from (1) a random sample of Texas citizens and (2) a selected sample of stakeholders in nonattainment and near-nonattainment cities. A sample of 870 Texas citizens was surveyed to assess public attitudes toward air quality issues, perceived risks of air pollution, and acceptance of and willingness to act on proposed policies. A sample of 102 stakeholders was interviewed to gather in-depth information on local conditions and awareness of air quality, incentives to change existing patterns of behavior to improve air quality, specific solutions to the air quality problem in Texas cities, and assessment of existing programs addressing the air quality issue. The results are summarized below.

- The environment ranks low as a problem in Texas. The environment ranked 8th out of a list of 10 problems mentioned by respondents as the most critical facing Texas—ahead of only social security and the national debt.
- Only 14% of Texans report using public transportation.
- 94% of the public reports using an automobile to get to work.
- 89% of the public reports riding alone to and from work.
- Those least willing to change driving behavior are white males, college-educated, over 26 years of age, and residents of attainment areas.
- Those most willing to change driving behavior are non-white females, less educated, younger, and living in nonattainment areas.
- Policies that limit personal freedom or result in higher costs to individuals received the least public support.
- The public viewed required emissions inspections and regular vehicle maintenance as the most effective measure to improve air quality.
- The most believable, competent, and reliable sources of information about air quality issues were those perceived to be independent and unable to profit from the information—university scientists ranked highest on each dimension.
- The public preferred to receive information from PSAs on television and the Internet. The Internet was particularly popular with the college-educated and those under 50 years of age.