

Executive Summary

The University of New Hampshire Survey Center conducted a survey for the New Hampshire Departments of Environmental Services and Health and Human Services to understand New Hampshire residents' views and opinions regarding environmental health. One thousand, one hundred and thirty-three (1,033) Granite State Panel members completed the survey online between December 9 and December 13, 2021. The margin of sampling error for the survey is +/- 3.0 percent. The following figures display survey results followed by the technical report. Appendix A contains detailed tabular results, and Appendix B contains the survey instrument.

Key Findings

Recreational Activities

About half of New Hampshire residents have engaged in gardening, hiking, or swimming in the past year, while about one-quarter have gone fishing. Respondents most frequently swim in the lakes and ocean while they fish most often in rivers, ponds, and lakes. Less than half of respondents who fish say that they eat the fish that they catch. Most Granite Staters who hike do so at least monthly when seasonally appropriate. Seven in ten respondents who garden say they have grown fruits and/or vegetables at their home in the past year. Among that group, the majority say their household eats meals with the fruits or vegetables they grow at least weekly. Nearly half of all respondents say they purchase fruits and vegetables grown by local vendors at least weekly when seasonally appropriate.

Environmental Threats

Nearly three in five Granite Staters are very or somewhat concerned about risks to their health posed by the environment. When asked what the most important environmental health concern facing themselves or their families is, respondents are most likely to choose climate change or water quality. More than one-third of New Hampshire residents think their environment contributes to cancer, asthma, and respiratory illness in their community. Respondents are most likely to be concerned about the environmental issues of drinking water quality, chemicals in consumer products, and climate change. Among various things they personally could be exposed to, respondents are most likely to be concerned about mold, pesticides, and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Drinking Water

New Hampshire residents are about equally likely to have a public water supply or a private well as their main source of drinking water while a smaller proportion use bottled water as their main source. Among those who have a well, about half say they have had their home's drinking water tested for its water quality and/or contamination and the majority say that the amount of available water from their well doesn't typically change depending on the season. Granite Staters are more likely to be concerned about contamination of drinking water and less water being available in the future than an increased cost of water or flooding during major storms when ranking water quality and access issues.

Superfund Site Awareness

Just under half of New Hampshire residents are aware of what a Superfund site is. A plurality don't know if there is a Superfund site in their town or city, but among those who did say whether there was one or not, nearly all were accurate in their answer. Among those who say there is a Superfund site in their town or city, very few could name that site. Majorities of Granite Staters are concerned or would be concerned if there was a Superfund site in their town and feel that having a Superfund site in their town or city would pose a high or moderate risk to their health. However, those who say there is a Superfund site in their town or city are slightly less likely to be concerned about it or feel it poses a risk to their health.

Sources of Information & Outreach

The most popular sources for environmental health-related information are news websites, television, New Hampshire State Agencies, and print media, with Granite Staters trusting New Hampshire State Agencies and news websites the most. If they had an environmental health-related concern, respondents would be most likely to reach out to the state government or a state agency, town or city government, their doctor or medical provider, the NH DES, or internet sources. Small majorities say they are very or somewhat aware of the state and federal government's efforts to track environmental hazards and possible links to chronic health problems. Most New Hampshire residents visit the websites of New Hampshire State Agencies every few months or less often. About three in ten respondents have contacted a New Hampshire State Agency about an environmental health issue. Respondents are familiar with the EPA, NH DPHS, and NH DES but are largely unfamiliar with ATSDR and APPLETREE. Most respondents would be likely to stop engaging in an activity or change their water source if they received a message from the state recommending they do so due to an environmental hazard.