Truckee Meadows Water Authority: Fluoridation Bill Study (AB193)

March/April 2017

Conducted by

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BACKGROUND:

Assembly Bill 193 (AB193) was introduced to the Nevada State Legislature's Committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Mining on February 13, 2017. The purpose of the bill was to require "the fluoridation of water provided by public water systems and water authorities in certain circumstances."

Existing Nevada state law requires the fluoridation of the public water in counties with a population of 700,000 or more (currently only Clark County). AB193 would extend the requirement to apply to counties with a population of 100,000 or more (currently adding only Washoe County).

AB193 states that it is an "unfunded mandate" that may have a fiscal impact and that it was "not requested by the affected local government."

Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) is the main municipal water utility that serves 85% of water customers in Washoe County. TMWA provides water services to approximately 124,000 households and 385,000 residents.

A third party engineering firm provided a preliminary cost estimate for fluoridation in the TMWA system of $66.5 million for infrastructure retrofits and $3 million annually for operations and maintenance. In order to comply with the bill, TMWA would need to raise customer rates approximately 9 percent.

TMWA's Board of Directors was appointed by the Reno City Council, Sparks City Council, and Washoe County officials. At the February 2017 Board of Directors meeting, TMWA's Board voted unanimously to not support AB193 and listed three reasons for their opposition: (1) pre-emption of local control, (2) circumvention of the previous countywide vote against fluoridation, and (3) the high cost of fluoridation, which would be passed on to TMWA customers.

At the February 2017 meeting, TMWA's Board of Directors also requested a survey of TMWA's residential customers to obtain their feedback about AB193.

METHODOLOGY:

Two different methodologies – a telephone version and an email version – of the same survey were used to obtain feedback from TMWA's residential customers regarding AB193. Both versions of the questionnaire contained the same three questions.

TELEPHONE VERSION:

- Field Dates: The telephone version of the study was in the field from March 22-26, 2017; interviews averaged 2.9 minutes per call.
- Source: Out of 124,002 households, TMWA supplied phone numbers for 105,820 or 85.3% of them.
- Sample Size: A random sample of **400** residential customers who reside in Washoe County were interviewed over the phone by trained market research professionals.
- Response Rate: The overall response rate was **10.0%** based on 400 completes out of 4,002 attempted phone numbers. Of the 838 residential customers who answered the phone, nearly half (47.7%) completed the survey.

Phone Call Disposition	Frequency	Percentage
No Answer – Working Numbers *(includes busy; answering machine)*	2,581	64.5%
No Answer – Non-Working Numbers	488	12.2%
No Answer – Blocked Numbers	95	2.4%
Answered – Ineligible *(17 non-residents plus 26 language barrier)*	43	1.1%
Answered – Refused *(includes 12 mid-terminates)*	395	9.9%
Answered – Complete	400	10.0%

- Confidence Interval: The confidence interval for the telephone study was ±4.9% at the 95% confidence level.
- Additional Note: Of the two methodologies, the telephone version is generally considered the more representative of the total population of TMWA's residential customers because they were contacted at random and from a larger pool of all customers.

EMAILED VERSION:

- Field Dates: The email version of the study was in the field from March 28-April 13, 2017 with a start date two days after the final telephone calls were completed.
- Source: Out of 124,002 households, TMWA had email addresses for 79,028 or 63.7% of them. The email version of the survey was sent to all 79,028 known email addresses; of these, nearly all (78,045 or 98.8%) were deliverable.
- Sample Size: A total of 6,651 customers responded and, of those, **6,373** resided in Washoe County and were the focus of this study.
- Response Rate: The overall response rate was **8.4%** based on all emails (6,651 out of 79,028) and was 8.2% based on deliverable emails to confirmed Washoe County residents (6,373 out of 78,045).
- Confidence Interval: The confidence interval for the email study was ±1.2% at the 95% confidence level.
- Additional Note: If there were multiple submissions from an email address on the source list – such as from hitting "submit" multiple times or from forwarding the survey to others – only the first response per email address was counted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Assembly Bill 193 (AB193), if passed, would require the fluoridation of TMWA's water supply in Washoe County. TMWA customers who reside in Washoe County were surveyed to obtain their feedback about this topic.

The questionnaire clarified that TMWA is neutral on fluoridation as a community health concept. It provided general reasons both in favor of and against supporting the additional cost to add fluoride to the water supply, as well as general reasons both in favor of and against supporting the Nevada State Legislature passing this bill without a vote of the public.

Over three out of five respondents – 63.0% of telephone respondents and 76.8% of email respondents – indicated that they would not support raising customers rates 9 percent to have fluoride added to the community's water supply.

Additionally, four out of five respondents – 79.5% of telephone respondents and 82.4% of email respondents – indicated that they would not support the Nevada State Legislature passing this bill without a vote of the public.

QUESTION #1 – WASHOE COUNTY RESIDENT STATUS:

1. *Do you currently reside in Washoe County?*

Currently Reside in Washoe County	PHONE SURVEY		EMAIL SURVEY	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Yes	400	**95.9%**	6,373	95.8%
No, Don't Know, Blank *(Screened Out)*	17	**4.1%**	278	4.2%
Total	417	**100.0%**	6,651	100.0%

Nearly all the potential respondents – 95.9% of the phone survey and 95.8% of the email survey respondents – indicated that they were currently Washoe County residents.

Only respondents who confirmed their Washoe County residency were included in the results shown below; the others were screened out of the call (for the phone survey) or of the analysis (for the email survey).

QUESTION #2 – SUPPORT ADDITIONAL COST TO HAVE FLUORIDE ADDED:

2. *Assembly Bill 193 (AB193) was recently introduced at the Nevada State Legislature. This bill would require fluoridation of the water supply for TMWA's customers.*

   TMWA is neutral on fluoridation as a community health concept. Some people support adding fluoride to the public water system because it is associated with oral health and preventing tooth decay. Other people oppose adding fluoride due to the increased cost and personal concerns about this method of distribution.

   Assembly Bill 193 provides no funding from the state. In order to comply with the bill, TMWA estimates it would need to raise all customer rates 9 percent – or about $4 per customer per month – to cover the cost of infrastructure retrofits, operations, and maintenance. Would you support this additional cost to your water bill to have fluoride added to the community's water supply?

Support Additional Cost to Have Fluoride Added to Water Supply	PHONE SURVEY (Washoe Co. Residents Only)		EMAIL SURVEY (Washoe Co. Residents Only)	
	Frequency (n=400)	Percent	Frequency (n=6,373)	Percent
Yes	110	**27.5%**	1,270	**19.9%**
No	252	**63.0%**	4,894	**76.8%**
Don't Know	38	**9.5%**	209	**3.3%**

Among phone respondents, over three out of five (63.0%) indicated that they would not support the additional cost to their water bill to have fluoride added to the community's water supply, while 27.5% would support the additional cost and 9.5% were undecided.

Among email respondents, three out of four (76.8%) indicated that they would not support the additional cost to their water bill to have fluoride added to the community's water supply, while 19.9% would support the additional cost and 3.3% were undecided.

In other words, the majority of respondents in both methodologies reported that they would not support the additional cost, with the email survey respondents being even more likely to say no (76.8%) than the telephone survey respondents (63.0%).

As noted in the Methodology Section, the telephone version is generally considered the more representative of the total population of TMWA's residential customers because they were contacted at random and from a larger pool of customers.

Three factors that may have contributed to the phone version having different results from the email version are: (1) the phone source captured a broader pool of customers (85.3% of households) than did the email source list (63.7% of households); (2) phone respondents were contacted at random while those with email may have been more likely to self-select in, and (3) there may have been a difference between hearing the questions on the telephone and reading (or re-reading) the questions online.

QUESTION #3 – LEGISLATURE PASSING AB193 WITHOUT PUBLIC VOTE:

3. *(If a Washoe County Resident) Washoe County voters opposed water fluoridation in a 2002 county ballot initiative. Some people say that public representatives in the Nevada State Legislature are empowered to decide whether to require fluoridation of the water supply without another public vote because it is a public health measure. Other people say that Washoe County voters should be able to vote on this issue again. Would you support the Nevada State Legislature passing this bill without a vote of the public?*

Support Nevada Legislature Passing AB193 Without a Vote of the Public	**PHONE SURVEY** (Washoe Co. Residents Only)		**EMAIL SURVEY** (Washoe Co. Residents Only)	
	Frequency (n=400)	**Percent**	Frequency (n=6,373)	**Percent**
Yes	66	**16.5%**	979	**15.4%**
No	318	**79.5%**	5,250	**82.4%**
Don't Know	16	**4.0%**	144	**2.2%**

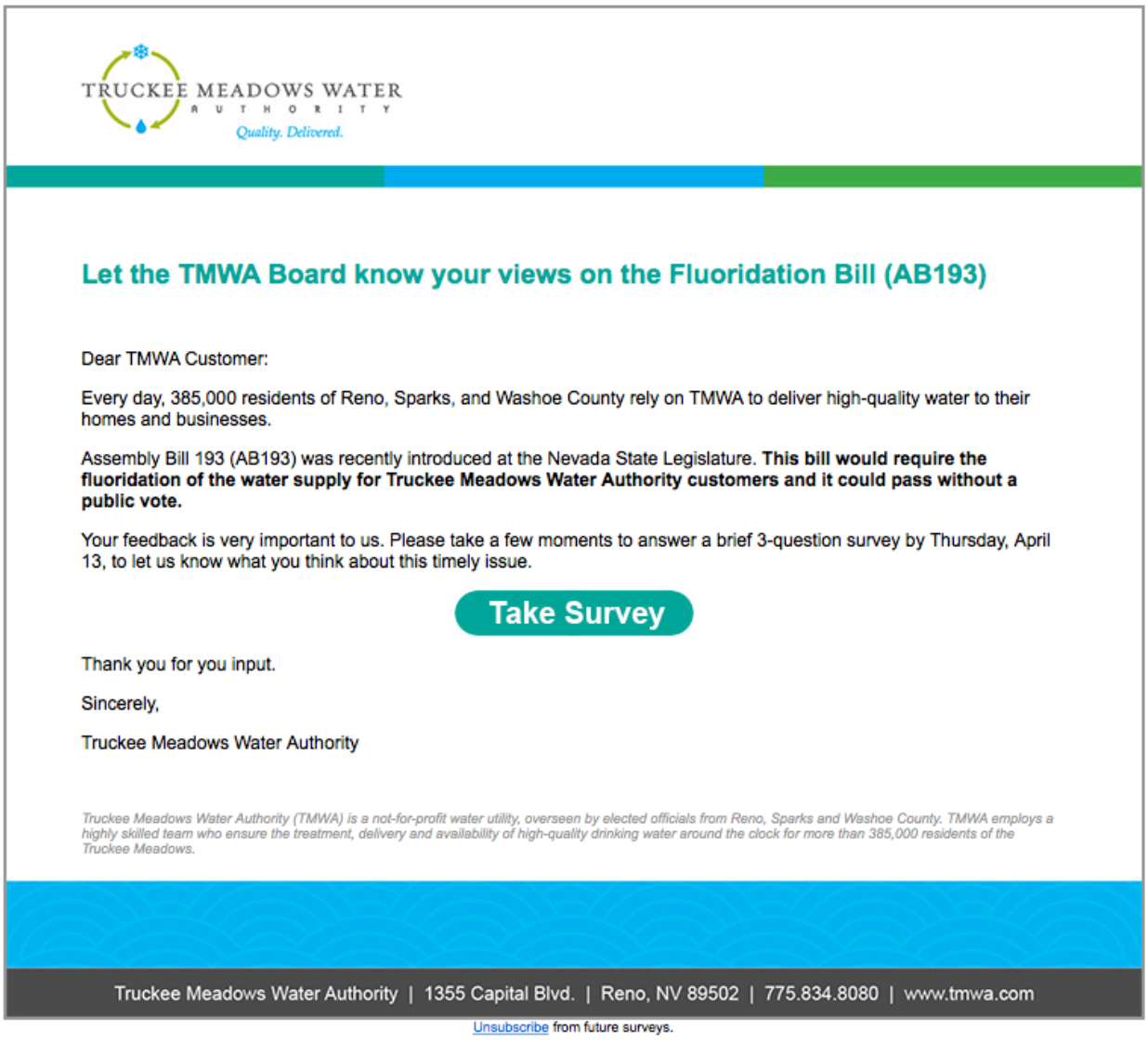
Among phone respondents, four out of five (79.5%) indicated that they would not support the Nevada State Legislature passing the AB193 bill without a vote of the public, while 16.5% would support this and 9.5% were undecided.

Among email respondents, four out of five (82.4%) indicated that they would not support the Nevada State Legislature passing the AB193 bill without a vote of the public, while 15.4% would support this and 2.2% were undecided.

For this question, phone respondents (79.5%) and email respondents (82.4%) were similar in reporting that they would not support the Nevada State Legislature passing this bill without a vote of the public. Just 16.5% of phone respondents and, similarly, 15.4% of email respondents indicated that they would support this bill passing without a vote of the public.

ADDENDEUM #1: EMAIL QUESTIONNAIRE CONTENT

Subject Line: Let the TMWA Board know your views on the Fluoridation Bill (AB193)



TRUCKEE MEADOWS WATER AUTHORITY

Quality. Delivered.

Let the TMWA Board know your views on the Fluoridation Bill (AB193)

Dear TMWA Customer:

Every day, 385,000 residents of Reno, Sparks, and Washoe County rely on TMWA to deliver high-quality water to their homes and businesses.

Assembly Bill 193 (AB193) was recently introduced at the Nevada State Legislature. **This bill would require the fluoridation of the water supply for Truckee Meadows Water Authority customers and it could pass without a public vote.**

Your feedback is very important to us. Please take a few moments to answer a brief 3-question survey by Thursday, April 13, to let us know what you think about this timely issue.

Take Survey

Thank you for you input.

Sincerely,

Truckee Meadows Water Authority

Truckee Meadows Water Authority (TMWA) is a not-for-profit water utility, overseen by elected officials from Reno, Sparks and Washoe County. TMWA employs a highly skilled team who ensure the treatment, delivery and availability of high-quality drinking water around the clock for more than 385,000 residents of the Truckee Meadows.

Truckee Meadows Water Authority | 1355 Capital Blvd. | Reno, NV 89502 | 775.834.8080 | www.tmwa.com

Unsubscribe from future surveys.

Post-Submit Page Content: Thank you for taking this survey. The TMWA Board appreciates your feedback. For more information from TMWA on this topic, please click here: *[link to TMWA page regarding Board of Directors Vote]*

ADDENDEUM #2: TELEPHONE QUESTIONNAIRE CONTENT

Hello, I am calling on behalf of Truckee Meadows Water Authority – your water company – to ask a three-question survey regarding Nevada Assembly Bill 193 that would require the fluoridation of the water supply for customers and that could pass without a public vote. Would you be willing to answer three yes/no questions for TMWA?

First, do you currently reside in Washoe County?

___ Yes
___ No *(Screen out)*
___ Don't Know *(Screen out)*

Second, Assembly Bill 193 was recently introduced at the Nevada State Legislature. This bill would require fluoridation of the water supply for TMWA's customers.

TMWA is neutral on fluoridation as a community health concept. Some people support adding fluoride to the public water system because it is associated with oral health and preventing tooth decay. Other people oppose adding fluoride due to the increased cost and personal concerns about this method of distribution.

Assembly Bill 193 provides no funding from the state. In order to comply with the bill, TMWA estimates it would need to raise all customer rates 9 percent – or about $4 per customer per month – to cover the cost of infrastructure retrofits, operations, and maintenance. Would you support this additional cost to your water bill to have fluoride added to the community's water supply?

___ Yes
___ No
___ Don't Know

Third, Washoe County voters opposed water fluoridation in a 2002 county ballot initiative. Some people say that public representatives in the Nevada State Legislature are empowered to decide whether to require fluoridation of the water supply without another public vote because it is a public health measure. Other people say that Washoe County voters should be able to vote on this issue again. Would you support the Nevada State Legislature passing this bill without a vote of the public?

___ Yes
___ No
___ Don't Know

Those are all the questions we have. For more information, please visit TMWA.com.