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**FM3**

*Public Opinion Research  
& Strategy*

TO: Interested Parties

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RE: California Voter Concerns About Drinking Water Quality

DATE: February 7, 2017

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Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) recently completed 1,000 telephone interviews with California voters to assess their views on potential threats to drinking water quality, and their willingness to support action to improve it.<sup>1</sup> The results reveal **intense concern about the potential for drinking water contamination, and strong support for efforts by state and local government to address it.** California voters show a remarkable recall of the drinking water problems in Flint, Michigan last year – and express serious concern about the potential for water quality problems of equivalent severity in their own community. **They hold state government, local government and water agencies accountable for action to ensure state drinking water, and would like to see their state legislator act to provide funding to improve water quality.** In fact, voters are willing to pay as much as a few dollars more on their water bills if it will help ensure safe drinking water in communities around the state.

Key specific findings of the survey include:

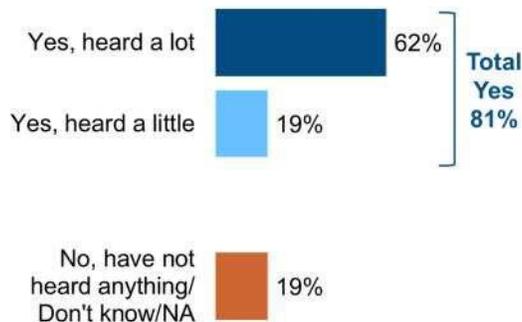
- **80% of Californians express concern about current water quality problems in the state.** When informed that “California’s public drinking water systems violated safety levels for contaminants more than 1,000 times in a recent year,” nearly half of California voters (47%) describe themselves as “extremely concerned” and an additional one-third (32%) as “very concerned.”
- **California voters are surprisingly familiar with water quality problems in Flint, Michigan.** More than four in five (81%) Californians are familiar with water contamination problems in Flint, Michigan, which first came to light nationally more than two years ago (see **Figure 1** on the following page). Remarkably, more than 60% say they have “heard a lot” about drinking water problems in Flint.

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**Figure 1: Awareness of Flint’s Water Quality Issues**

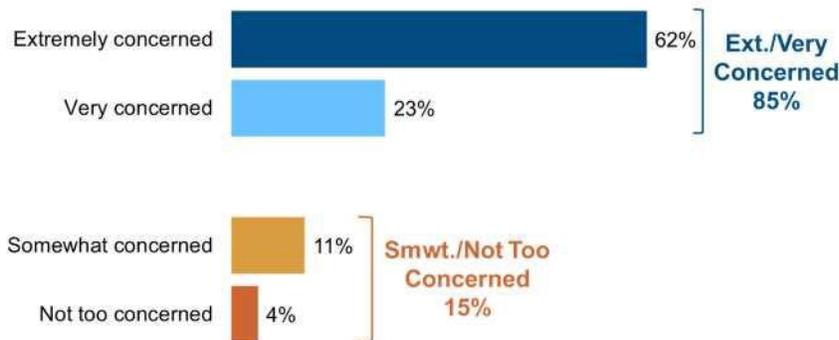
*Have you seen, heard, or read anything about recent severe water quality problems in the city of Flint, Michigan?*



- **Nearly all Californians say they would be “extremely” or “very concerned” if they knew unsafe substances were found in their drinking water.** After hearing that testing of some California water supplies has found unsafe levels of arsenic, nitrates, uranium and perchlorate, more than four in five (85%) said they would be “extremely” or “very concerned” if that applied to their water – 62 percent would be “extremely concerned” as shown in **Figure 2 below**.

**Figure 2: Concern about Contamination**

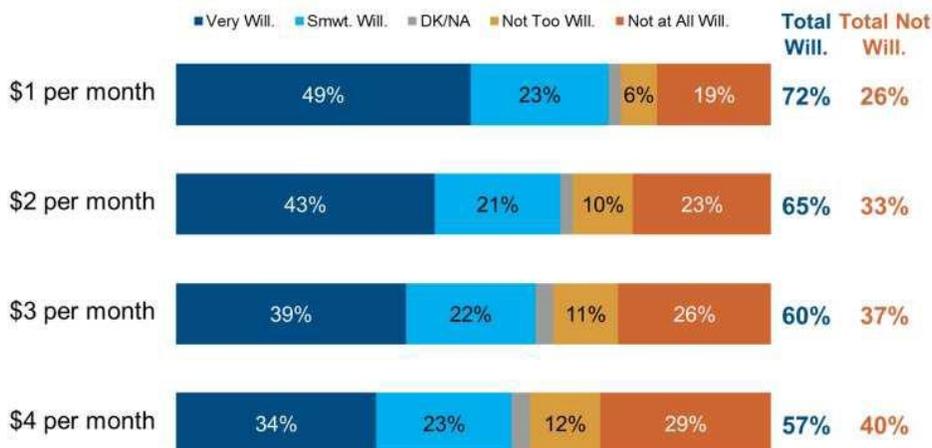
*Testing shows that a number of substances are found at unsafe levels in water supplies in some parts of California. Substances most commonly found include arsenic, nitrates, uranium, and perchlorate. If you knew that one or more of these substances were present at unsafe levels in your own household drinking water, would you be ...?*



- **Strong majorities are willing to pay to fix drinking water contamination throughout the state with a fee on their water bill.** Nearly three in five (57%) would be willing to pay as much as an additional four dollars per month on their water bill to fix unsafe levels of contamination (**Figure 3**), with 34 percent “very willing.” Broader and stronger majorities would be willing to pay lower amounts.

**Figure 3: Willingness to Pay to Fix Drinking Water Problems**

Suppose this fee to fix drinking water problems in communities with unsafe levels of contaminants in their water supply cost \_\_\_\_\_. In that case, would you be very willing, somewhat willing, not too willing, or not at all willing to pay it?



- Given a choice, California voters favor additional investment in water infrastructure by nearly **four-to-one**. Voters were also presented with a potential solution their representatives could enact. Given the choice between investments in infrastructure and keeping water rates low, California voters preferred investments by a margin of nearly four to one (Figure 5 on the next page).

**Figure 4: Support for Water Infrastructure Investment**

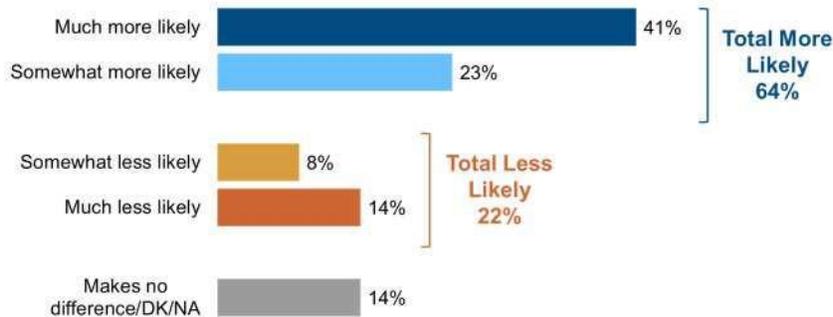
I am going to read you several pairs of statements about water in California. Please tell me which statement comes closest to your opinion. Remember, choose just one even if it's hard to decide.

Statement	% Chosen
We should invest in infrastructure to help ensure the safety of our drinking water, even if it means paying a few more dollars per month.	71%
We should keep water rates low, even if that means we do not make new investments in infrastructure to ensure safe drinking water.	18%
Both/Neither/Don't know	11%

- Voters are more likely to support a legislator who backs a clean drinking water fee by a **margin of nearly three to one**. More than two in five (41%) of California voters say they are “much more likely” to vote for a representative who supports a safe drinking water fee, as shown in **Figure 5**. That is nearly twice the share who say they are *less* likely to vote for a legislator who backs such a fee (22%).

**Figure 5: Support for a State Legislator Who Supports a Clean Drinking Water Fee**

Suppose your state legislator supported this proposed fee to ensure safe drinking water. In that case, would you be more likely or less likely to vote for that state legislator?



- 70% of voters believe their state and local elected officials bear “major responsibility” for ensuring safe drinking water for all Californians.** Unsurprisingly, four in five (80%) say their local water agencies bear “major responsibility” for ensuring safe drinking water. But as shown in **Figure 6**, there is a nearly universal sense among California voters that state legislators are also responsible for ensuring safe drinking water in our communities. Fully 94 percent say their city and county governments have “major” or “some responsibility” for the issue.

**Figure 6: Responsibility for Ensuring Safe Drinking Water**

Please tell me whether you believe \_\_\_\_\_ should have a major responsibility, some responsibility, a little responsibility, or no responsibility for ensuring safe drinking water for California communities.

	Major Responsibility	Major/Some Responsibility
Local water agencies	80%	95%
City and county governments	70%	94%
Your state legislator	70%	92%
Governor Jerry Brown	67%	90%

These findings clearly indicate that **Californians are highly concerned with maintaining access to safe drinking water**. They are willing to take a range of steps to address the issue, including reaching into their pocketbooks to pay more on their water bills and voting for legislative candidates who back such a fee.

<sup>i</sup> **Methodology:** From Jan. 17-23, 2017, FM3 completed 1,000 telephone interviews in English and Spanish (on both landlines and cell phones) with likely November 2018 voters in California. The margin of sampling error for the study is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level; margins of error for population subgroups within the sample will be higher. Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.