



*behavior research center's*

# *Rocky Mountain Poll*

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ARRAY OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES APPEAR POISED  
TO AFFECT ARIZONA POLITICS: WATER AND  
AIR POLLUTION TOP THE LIST

Phoenix, Arizona, January 30, 2003. Most Arizonans doubtless hope that the economy gets its legs under it again soon and that our young men and women do not have to fight in a foreign war. If such hopes come true and the public is no longer distracted by such gigantic and difficult concerns, other matters appear poised to reemerge as strong domestic issues. Among these is the environment and, particularly, pollution of air and water resources.

In two recent surveys conducted across Arizona, a majority express concern about each of twelve environmental issues ranging from soil contamination and air pollution to genetically altered foods finding their way into the food supply. For some of the issues tested, public concern exceeds 80 percent, transcends all political parties and regions of the state, and includes 40 percent of the public who say these are issues about which they are "very concerned." Such widespread concerns could well emerge in this decade as issues of great potency in Arizona politics.

It also appears that Arizonans of Hispanic origin are even more concerned about nearly all of these issues than is the general population, a finding that may stand as an early flag, perhaps, to political parties who seek alignment on issues that will appeal to this growing population segment.

As might be expected, the environmental issues of greatest concern to Arizonans are those that relate to contamination of the air, soil or water. For each of these, 80 percent of the general public and 90 percent of Hispanics express concerns. One additional environmental category that landed among the top five, and which out-pollled such major international issues as global warming, damage to the ozone layer and loss of rain forests, is the visual pollution of litter along roads and highways.

The environment has been a matter of growing interest to Arizonans ranging back into the 1960s when public support for curbs on air pollution from copper mine smelters was sufficient to help push tough regulations through a legislature that had been friendly with the industry for literally decades. Air pollution in the urban areas and now in Arizona's growing rural areas has generated broad support for auto emissions testing even though it carries with it direct costs to the public for the testing and requires individuals to take the time to bring their autos into testing stations. As well, the creation of

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national parks and monuments to preserve sensitive areas has drawn huge levels of public support despite opposition by then Governor Hull and others in the legislature. More recently, even during the difficult economic times of the past several years, environmental issues managed to remain among the top five major issues of concern to Arizonans; in fact, the environment currently holds the number four position only after the economy, crime and transportation.

At the top of the list of environmental concerns are various forms of water pollution (ground water, surface water in streams, lakes and reservoirs), air pollution and contamination of soils by toxic waste. On these issues, four in ten say they are matters about which they are “very concerned” and a slightly larger percent rate them as matters of concern, but not in the “very concerned” category. Or stated in other words, fewer than a fifth of Arizonans classify these as issues about which they have “no” concern.

Of particular interest in this survey is that while overall concern on these issues clearly cuts across political and generational lines, it is equally clear that there are some differences in opinion based on partisan affiliation. More specifically, global warming and damage to the ozone layer are of far greater concern to Democrats than to Republicans. On the other hand, loss of natural areas to commercial and residential development draws stronger concern levels from Republicans than Democrats.

The top five issues tested draw high and nearly equal levels of concern from Democrats, Independent and Republicans, giving them great potential for development in the future, assuming there emerges a voice interested in building a political career on such issues. These include:

- Soil contamination by toxic waste;
- Air pollution;
- Surface water pollution of streams, lakes and reservoirs;
- Ground water pollution; and
- Litter around streets and highways.

Public concern is also fairly widespread on five other environmental issues, but is not as intense, with two-thirds to 72 percent saying they are concerned about them, but less than a third rating themselves as being “very concerned.” These include:

- loss of rain forests
- loss of natural areas to development
- damage to the earth’s ozone layer
- global warming, and
- extinction of species.

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Two of the twelve issues tested emerged at the bottom of the list, but one may be a “sleeper” for the future inasmuch as it already has a majority of the public expressing concern. More specifically, the issue of genetically altered foods in the food chain currently registers 22 percent saying they are “very concerned” and another 37 percent simply “concerned.” At the bottom of the list (but nonetheless with 57 percent expressing concern) is the issue of cigarette smoking in public places. Its last place in this test is interesting and may reflect public awareness that grass root efforts for smoking bans have already gained success at the state and municipal level.

The findings outlined in this report are based on a survey of 675 adults across Arizona conducted between January 3<sup>rd</sup> and January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003, by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona as part of the Center’s independent and non-partisan Rocky Mountain Poll series. The public is welcome to visit [www.brcpolls.com](http://www.brcpolls.com) to read this and other recent polls.

-30-

EDITOR'S NOTE: This Rocky Mountain Poll Arizona (2003-I-08) is based on 675 telephone interviews with adults across Arizona including 516 registered voters, conducted from January 3<sup>rd</sup> through January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003. In the overall sample, one may say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 3.8 percent of what they would have been had the entire adult population been surveyed.

Data regarding Hispanics’ views on environmental issues were based on 505 telephone interviews with Hispanic heads of household across Maricopa and Pima Counties, conducted from October 16 through November 2, 2002 throughout Arizona as part of Behavior Research Center’s HispanicTRACK™ research program. In the overall sample, one may say with 95 percent certainty that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 4.4 percent of what they would have been had the entire adult population been surveyed. The Rocky Mountain Poll and Latino Poll (from HispanicTRACK™) are conducted by the Behavior Research Center of Arizona and are independent and non-partisan research programs.

This statement conforms to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

**ENCLOSED:** Statistical data for reference.

For this and other polls, see [www.brcpolls.com/results](http://www.brcpolls.com/results).

**STATISTICAL DATA**

Behavior Research Center  
Rocky Mountain Poll - Arizona  
RMP 2003-I-08

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*“Next, I would like to read you a list of environmental issues. For each one please tell me if you are very concerned, concerned, not very concerned or not at all concerned about each.”*

	VERY CONCERNED	SOMEWHAT CONCERNED	ANY CONCERN
Contamination of soil by toxic waste	43%	41%	84%
Air pollution	39	45	84
Pollution of lakes, rivers and reservoirs	40	43	83
Pollution of natural water in the ground	40	42	82
Litter around highways and city streets	23	58	81
Loss of tropical rain forests	27	45	72
Destruction of natural areas for homes and commercial buildings	33	38	71
Damage to the Earth’s ozone layer	26	43	69
Global warming	20	46	66
Extinction of some species of animals and plants	24	41	65
Genetically altered foods, like corn and other vegetables, for consumers	22	37	59
Cigarette smoking in public places	27	30	57

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|                                                                          | GENERAL POPULATION | HISPANIC POPULATION |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Contamination of soil by toxic waste                                     | 84%                | 92%                 |
| Air pollution                                                            | 84                 | 92                  |
| Pollution of lakes, rivers and reservoirs                                | 83                 | 90                  |
| Pollution of natural water in the ground                                 | 82                 | 90                  |
| Litter around highways and city streets                                  | 81                 | 89                  |
| Loss of tropical rain forests                                            | 72                 | 82                  |
| Destruction of natural areas for homes and commercial buildings          | 71                 | 82                  |
| Damage to the Earth’s ozone layer                                        | 69                 | 75                  |
| Global warming                                                           | 66                 | 74                  |
| Extinction of some species of animals and plants                         | 65                 | 73                  |
| Genetically altered foods, like corn and other vegetables, for consumers | 59                 | 69                  |
| Cigarette smoking in public places                                       | 57                 | 69                  |

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