

# Public Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Climate Change: Fact Sheet

## Overview of the Survey

For local governments, understanding public perceptions and attitudes towards climate change can be a powerful planning tool. This fact sheet highlights the findings from a survey conducted on the general public's perceptions of climate change. It aims to inform local government staff, elected and appointed representatives, and the general public on how participants in the Great Lakes Region view climate change issues.

The following information was generated from a random-sample phone survey completed by 2,049 participants between April and May of 2012. The survey targeted midsized cities with populations between 25,000 and 300,000, in the Great Lakes Region, which included eight US states and one Canadian province. The complete survey results are available through GLAA-C and may be attained by contacting Beth Gibbons at- [elzrenc@umich.edu](mailto:elzrenc@umich.edu) or via the GLAA-C website at- [www.graham.umich.edu/glaac](http://www.graham.umich.edu/glaac).

## Key Findings:

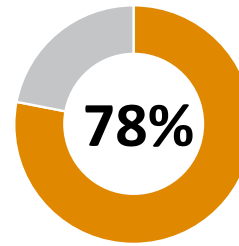
- 78% of survey participants believe that we are in a period of climate change and of these 85% believe human activity has played a significant role in causing climate change.
- While 47% of participants anticipate climate change will lead to adverse impacts in the Great Lakes Region, only 25% believe that they themselves or their families face risk from climate change impacts.
- The majority (63%) of participants believe that climate change will increase existing environmental hazards, such as drinking water pollution.
- The majority (69%) of participants believe that local government should take action to protect their community against climate change impacts.
- A majority of participants (55%) perceive universities as a trusted source of climate change information.



Kites on Lake Huron

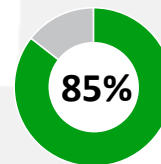
Source: Flickr Creative Commons-ColorblindRain

**78% of survey participants responded that they believe that climate change is taking place.**

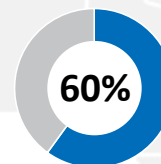


*"I believe we are in a period of climate change."*

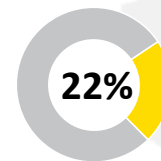
**Of the 78% of survey participants that believe climate change is taking place...**



*"I believe that human activity has played a significant role in causing climate change."*



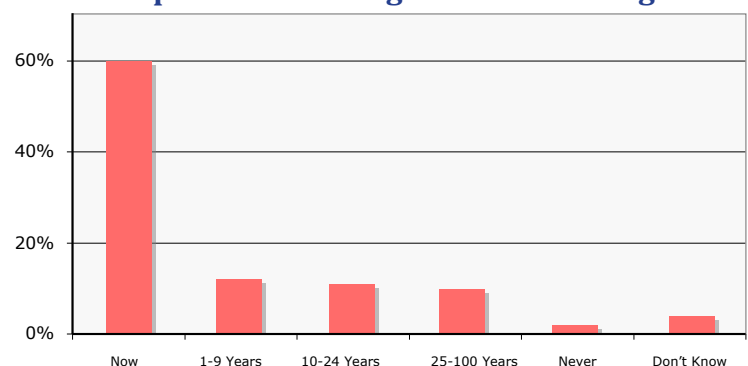
*"I feel that climate change has already impacted my community."*



*"I believe that climate change will impact my community within the next 25 years."*

**"When do you think the results of climate change will impact your local community?"**

## Perceptions on Timing of Climate Change



**"Only 2% of participants feel that climate change will never happen."**



The Great Lakes from Marshall Space Flight Center Source: NASA

### Environmental Hazards

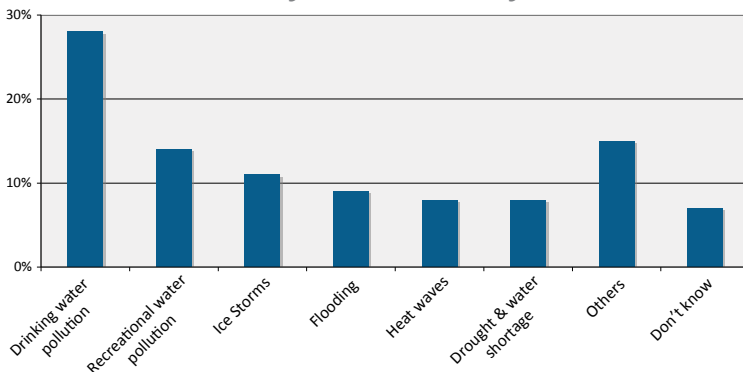
The majority (63%) of respondents believe that climate change will increase existing environmental hazards. When asked to identify the most severe threat facing their community, participants identified **drinking water pollution** nearly 2 to 1 over any other threat. However, 54% responded that they are ‘not informed’ or only ‘slightly informed’ about their local governments plans, actions, and policies related to drinking water pollution.

This lack of knowledge extends beyond drinking water. Overall 51% of participants report “not being informed at all” or being only “slightly informed” about their local government’s policies, plans, and actions to deal with a particular hazard. Only 12% of those surveyed feel “very” or “extremely” informed about their local governments’ plans.

Despite a lack of knowledge about local government plans, survey participants strongly support local government taking action to address climate change impacts. Over all 79% believe some effort should be made by local government, and 44.2% believe large or extremely large efforts should be made.

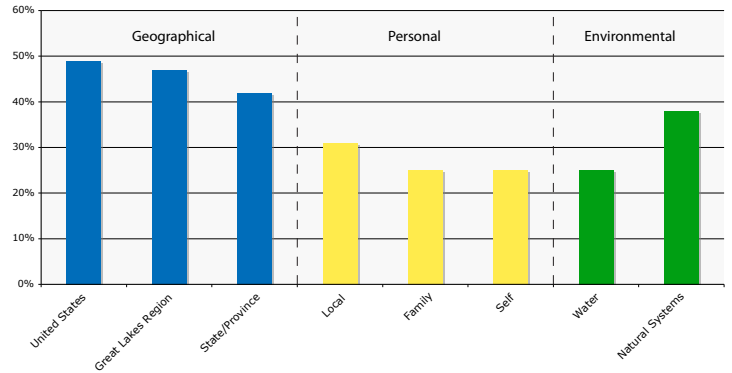
### Most Serious Hazard to Community

*“Which hazard do you believe is the most serious threat to your community?”*



*When ranking the severity of environmental hazards– 87.8% of survey participants stated their belief that flooding was ‘not at all a risk’ or a ‘moderate risk’ to their community.*

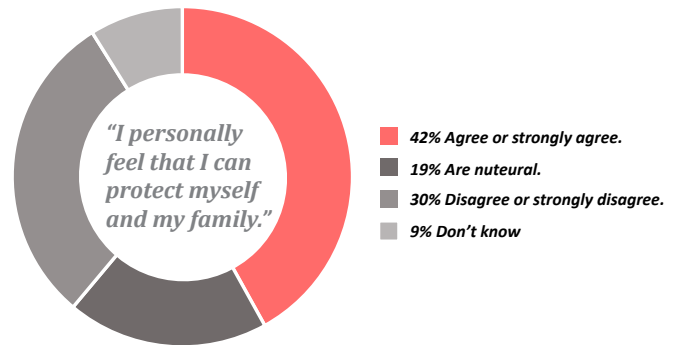
### Scale of ‘Large or Extremely Large Impacts’ from Climate Change



### Lack of Personal Risk

The survey revealed critical information on respondents’ perceptions of climate change impacts across scales. The majority of respondents reported that the United States (49%), The Great Lakes Region (47%) and their state or province (42%) would experience large or extremely large impacts from climate change. When asked about impacts to their local area (31%), family (25%) and self (25%), fewer respondents feel that there would be large or extremely large impacts from climate change.

Likewise, 48% responded they feel they could protect themselves and their family from the negative impacts of climate change. In contrast to this, 58% of participants believe they have little or no influence over climate change.



### Conclusions

Despite growing social consensus around climate change practitioners still struggle to prioritize actions in their communities. The survey results identify a need to translate global threats into tangible local impacts. This step is vital as communities attempt to make a case for climate action and champion solutions to build more resilient communities.

For some cities, this may involve strategic public outreach and education; for others, it could be building new coalitions of private, public, and nonprofit representatives.

The worst case margin of error for this data is +/- 2.16%.