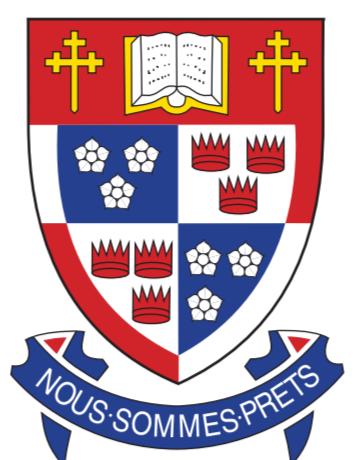


# Drinking Water Policy

attitudes and perception are key

Simon Fraser University



SFU  
RESEARCH  
—MATTERS

## BC Water Facts

- 3300 water systems in BC.
- 90% of population served by 96 systems.
- 10% of population served by 3236 systems.
- Approximately 63 000 private wells.
- 304 boil water advisories in effect in August 2001.

(BC Gov't Action plan for Safe Drinking Water, 2002)



## Study to date:

- Survey first piloted at the University of Calgary in the spring of 2003, students surveyed on their uses of bottled water.
- Survey refined and conducted at Simon Fraser University in the summer 2003.
- In the fall 2003 over 1000 surveys conducted by SFU students as part of a Communications Policy & Research Methods course.
- In March of 2004, the results from the survey as well as an interactive poster were presented at the Applied Sciences Institute Exchange 2004.

## What we found.

### Mixed messages

Chart 1A: Vancouver survey-% that would drink tap water in:

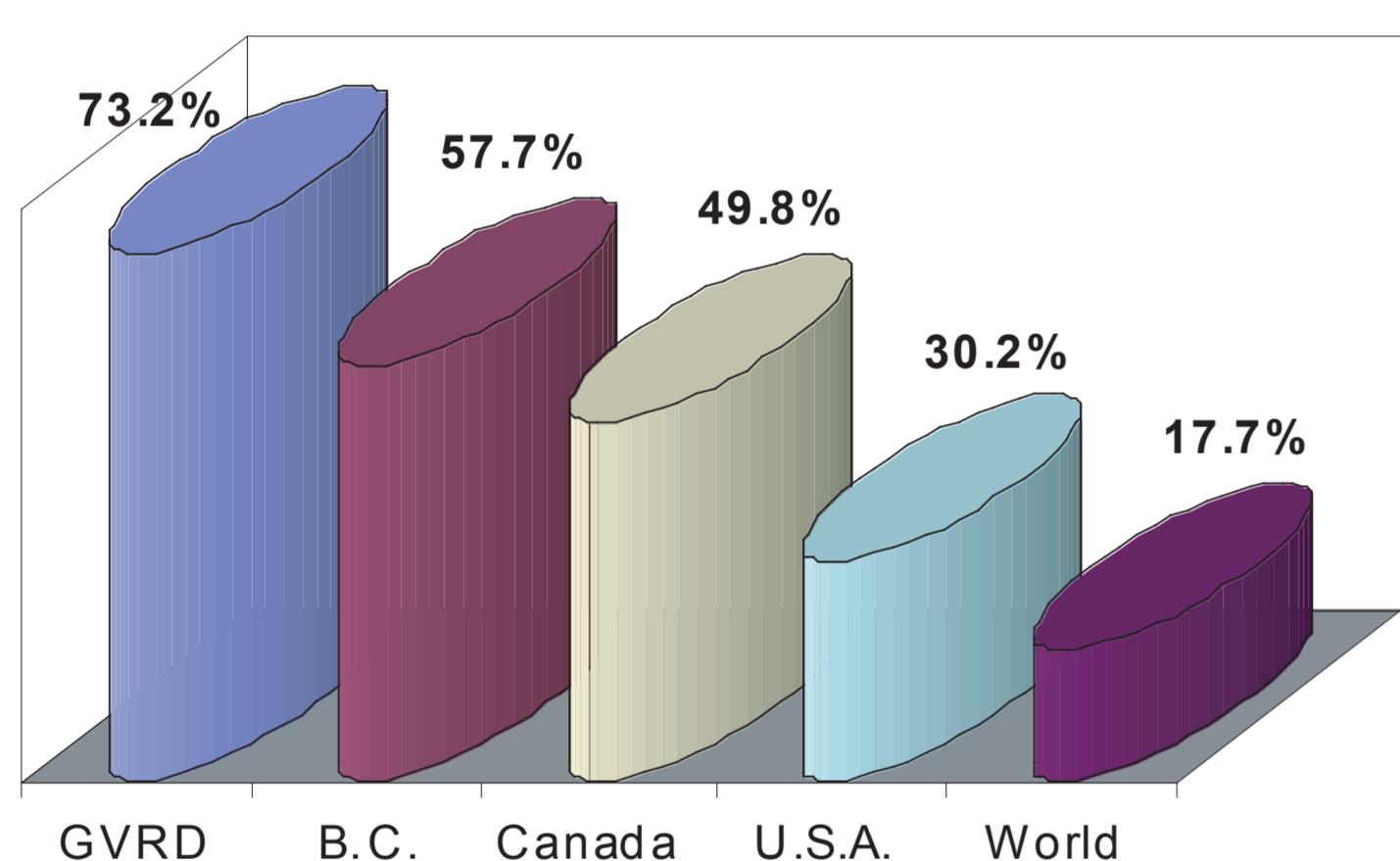
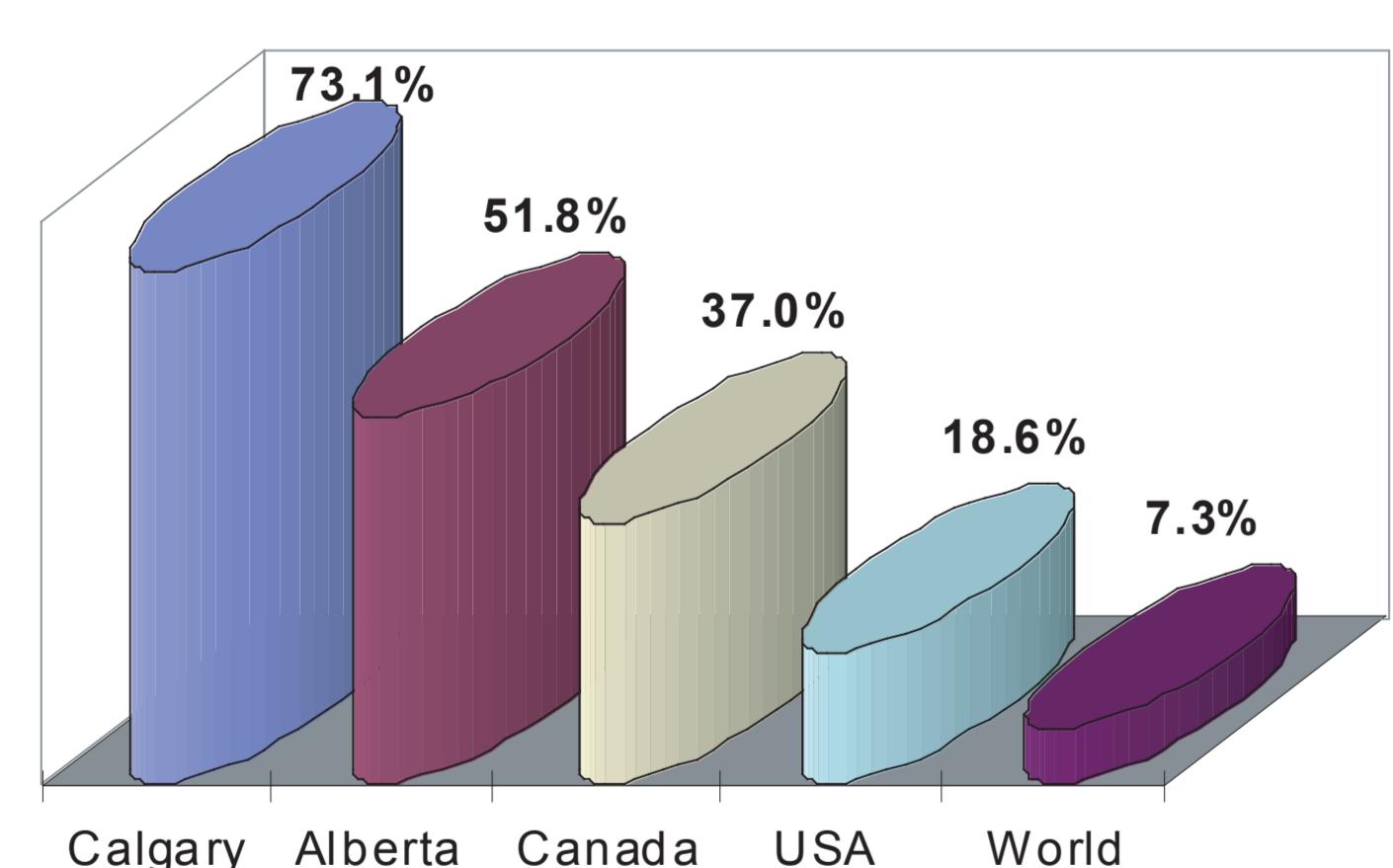


Chart 1B: Calgary survey-% that would drink tap water in:

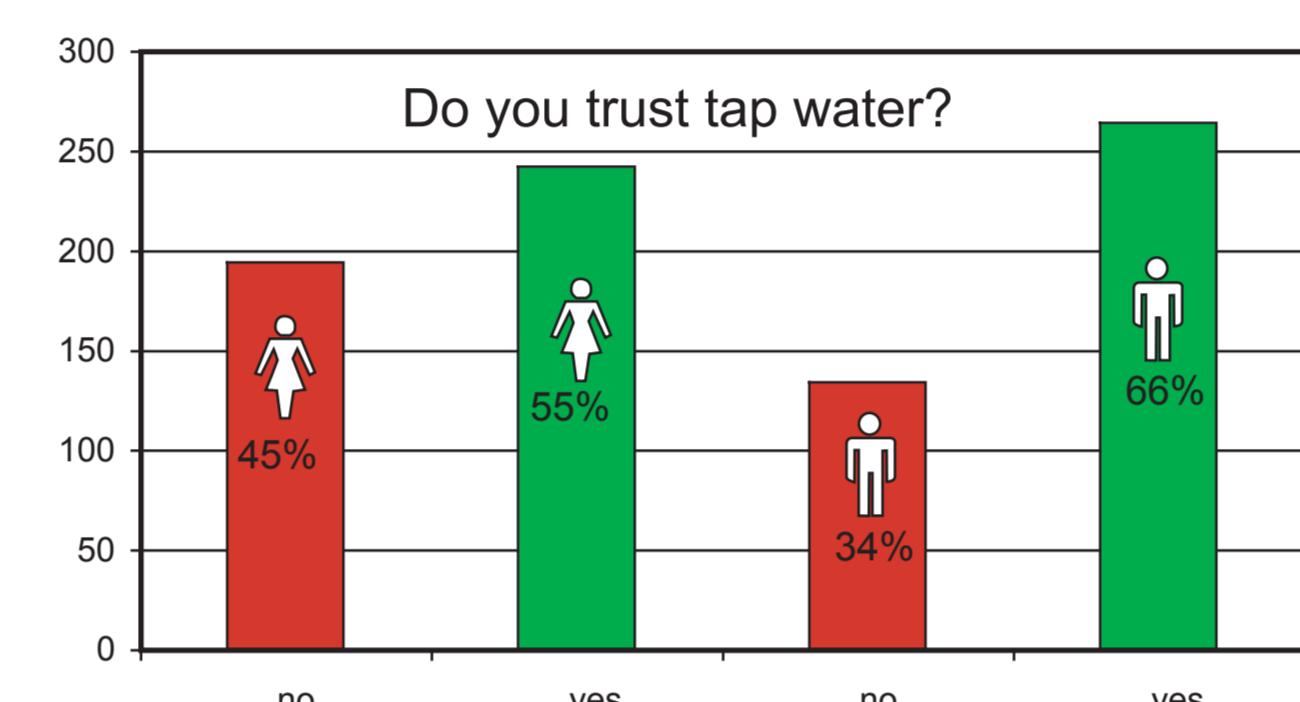


Charts 1A & B illustrate that the further one gets from their place of residence, the less likely they are to drink tap water. Since 73% would drink tap water in the GVRD and in Calgary, this could infer that there is a high degree of satisfaction with these water systems, indeed, 3/4 of the Vancouver group trust tap water in general; however 65% of these use filtered or bottled water at home. Why?

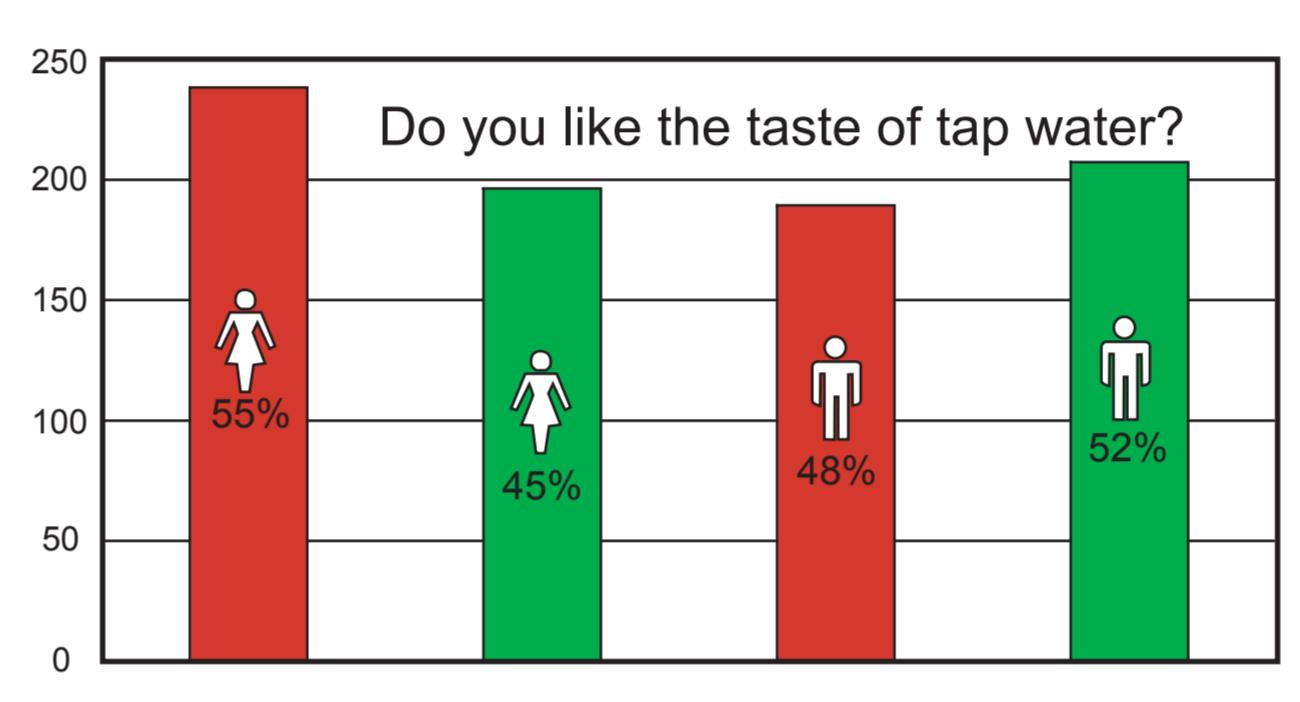
### Different Sex, different Attitudes about water

Surveyors also observed the apparent age, and gender of respondents. When these factors were considered, we found slight variations among age groups but more significant differences between males and females.

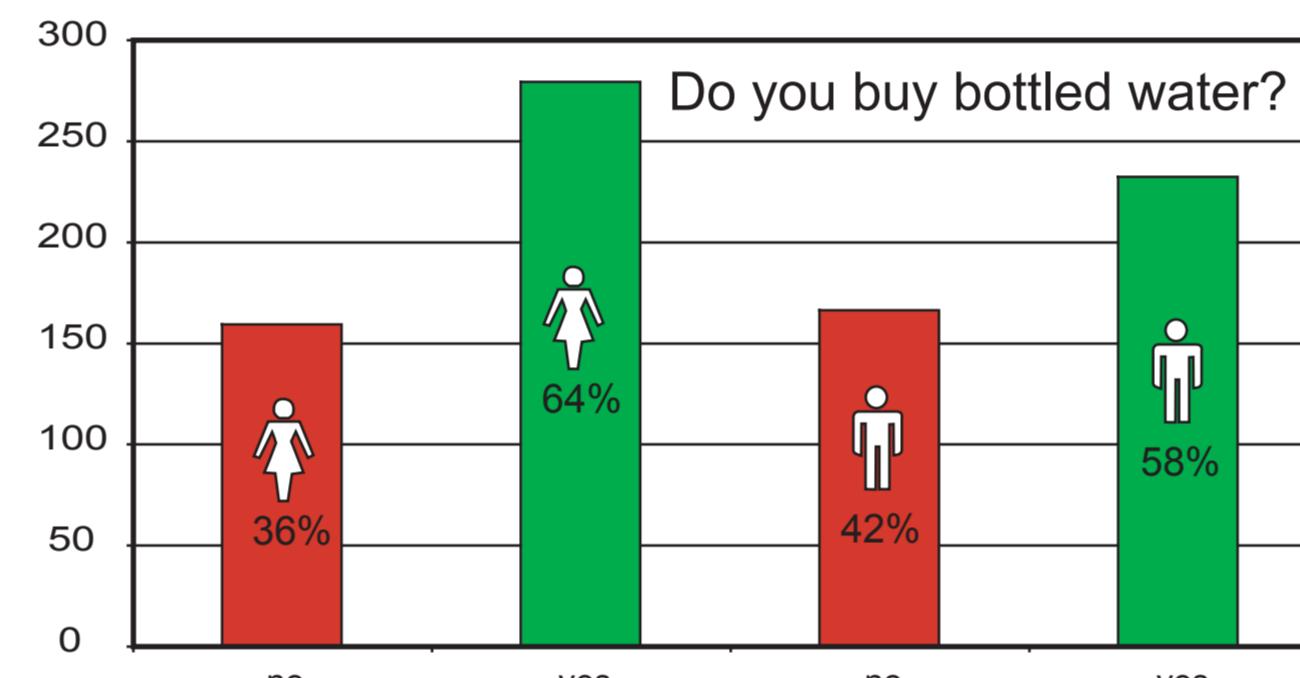
#### Gender & Trust



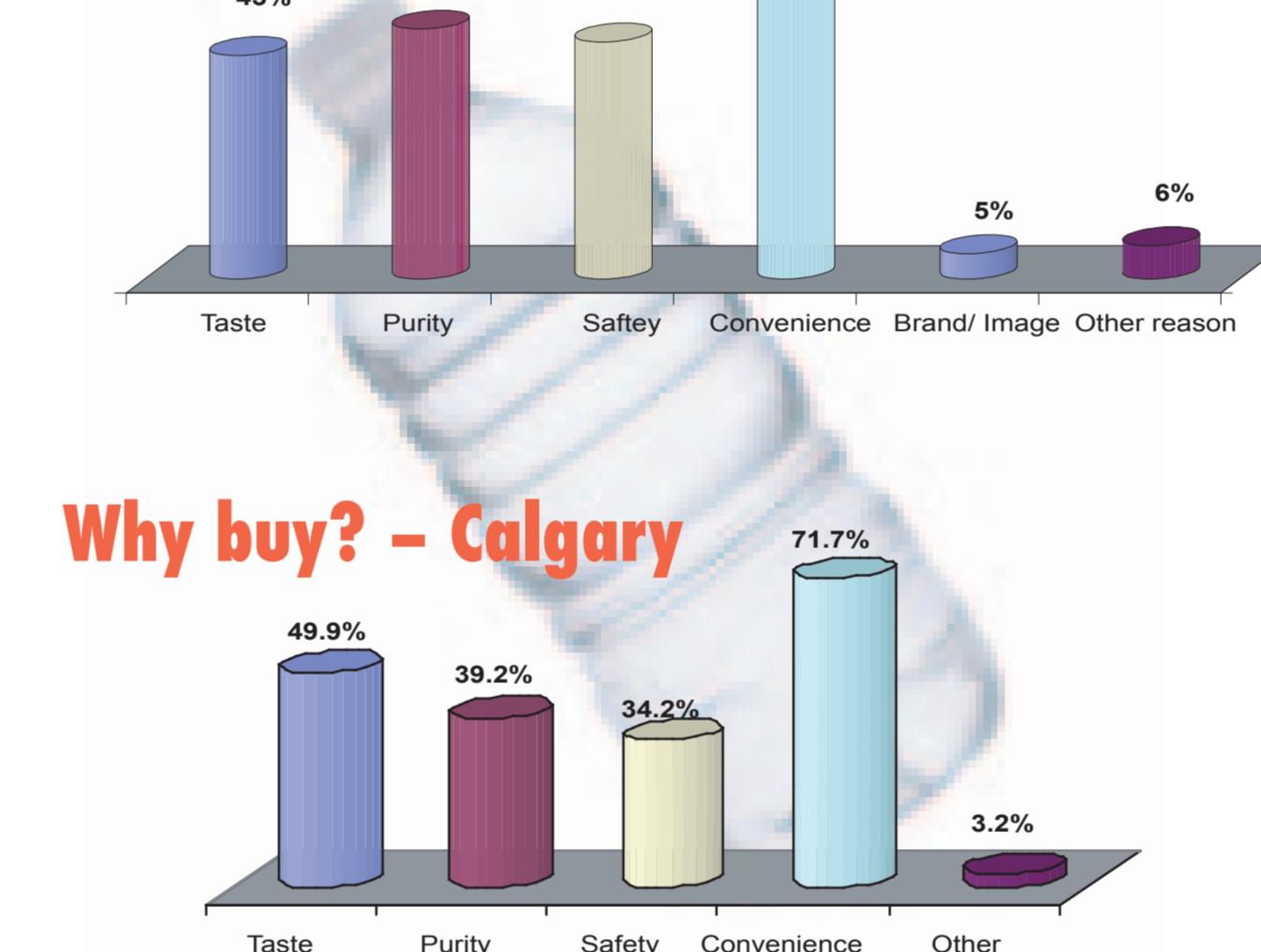
#### Gender & Taste



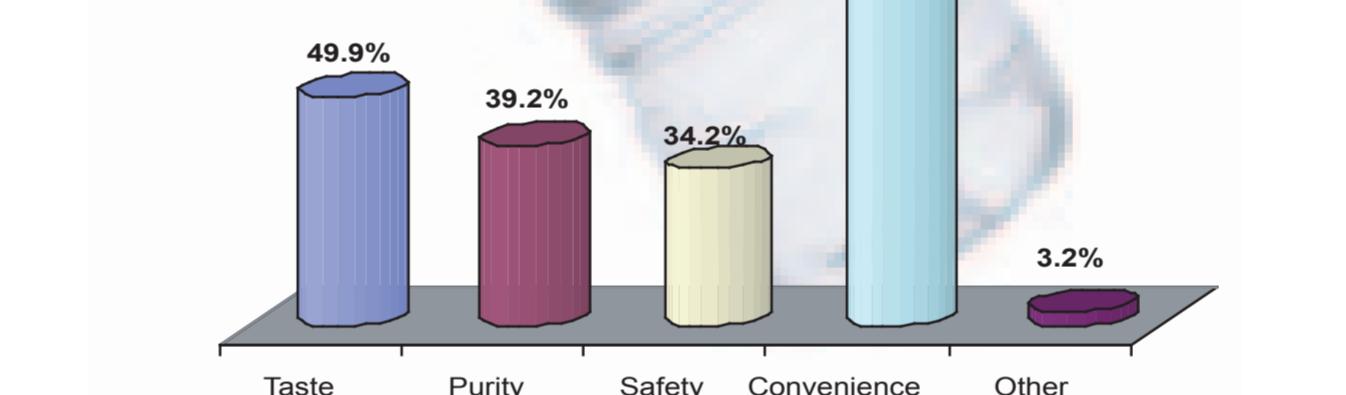
#### Gender & Small bottles



#### Why buy? – Vancouver



#### Why buy? – Calgary



### Is there a policy-perception-disconnect?

The majority of BC residents trust and like the taste of their tap water, and yet the majority surveyed also filter or buy bottled water.

#### Why?

As it turns out, 65% of the BC residents surveyed buy bottled water for convenience, but high numbers (40%+) said they buy water for concerns of safety, taste and purity. The Calgary survey had similar results, but with even higher numbers buying bottled water for convenience (71.7%) and taste (49.9%).

Do these facts suggest that people have lost faith in the supply? Also if people are turning to bottled and filtered water, despite the tested safety of the municipal supply, should all water be treated for drinking purposes or should water treatment responsibility trickle down to the end user?

### How Much Water Do We Need?

UNESCO's basic water requirement is around 50 litres per day  
[http://www.unesco.org/science/wcs/meetings/eur\\_paris\\_water\\_98.htm](http://www.unesco.org/science/wcs/meetings/eur_paris_water_98.htm)

The average consumption in the GVRD is over 300 litres per capita per day  
<http://www.nsnews.com/issues03/w02703/075103/news/075103nn2.html>

In the developing world the average person uses 10 litres per day.  
<http://www.unep.org/web/2003/keyfacts.htm>

### Where Does all our water go?

Clothes Washers-23%      Faucets-14%  
Toilets-30%      Leaks-10%      Baths-6%  
Other-1%      Showers-14%      Dishwashers-2%

<http://www.gvrd.bc.ca/water/residential-conservation-initiatives.htm>



### Future Research

As water is increasingly seen as a scarce resource more citizens are concerned about how we use, or misuse our supply. We need to raise awareness, but a broader survey would provide data more reflective of all Canadian's attitudes.

A website is also planned which will facilitate online data collection and gathering to enable national co-ordination of local surveys, but issues of accuracy and jurisdictional co-operation remain. This site could also serve as a clearing house and forum for policy issues related to drinking water.

More investigation is also needed on: public-private initiatives for water supply and distribution; large-scale vs point of use treatment systems; and the 'marketing' of tap water.