

Highlights of the Rural Residential Focus Group

The rural residential focus group of 11 participants met on May 16th 2013 at the Children's Farm Home campus. The purpose of the focus group was two-fold 1) Explore barriers to residents having their well water tested and 2) Probe barriers to residents taking action to protect groundwater. Over a two hour period the facilitator worked through a series of questions with the group. Key concepts that arose from the focus group discussion that have implications for future social marketing purposes include:

Barriers to well water testing

- None of the group were aware of the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area (GWMA). Participants perceived a GWMA to mean that there is some sort of problem, within a certain area, that needs to be managed.
- Most participants had a basic understanding of groundwater. There was some perception groundwater was like an underground water body (river, lake, etc.).
- There is a mixture of belief in whether their personal drinking water is clean and safe.
- Taste is important and sometimes associated with "safe". Perceptions are not based on testing. Only one participant tested on a "regular" basis whereas others tested infrequently.
- Most participants had some sort of "treatment" (UV, reverse osmosis, softener, charcoal filter, etc.) indicating a willingness to purchase a "treatment" system for an identified problem (iron, sulfur smell/taste, hardness, etc.). With the exception of one participant however, nitrate was not an identified problem that treatment addressed.
- Most participants agreed that it was difficult to know where to take water samples and results are difficult to interpret.
- Awareness and concern levels seem to be greater the closer to a known problem (neighbor has high nitrate vs. the GWMA has high nitrate.)

Summary of "Barriers" to well water testing:

1. Competing with taking time in busy lives
2. Not knowing where to take the samples
3. Belief that you cannot do anything about it anyway
4. Lack of knowledge of the health risks
5. The "problem" is not "close to home"

Barriers to taking action to protect groundwater:

- A wide range of potential contributors were identified and the land uses perceived as having the highest risk include agriculture (fertilizers and pesticides) and rural residential (primarily septic systems).
- Group members thought that the big contributors should be identified and address problem. They also thought that with a public health issue that the government should solve the problem.
- Participants were not sure what they can do, because the problem is so large.
- None of the group were aware of the Southern Willamette Valley Groundwater Management Area (GWMA), although one focus group participant was also involved with OSU and well water nitrate testing.