

Inland residents show green streak in annual survey

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By Elaine Regus

More than half of Inland-area residents surveyed said they believe that protecting the environment is more important than economic growth in the region, according to a poll released today.

And many say they are doing their part by recycling, conserving water and turning off lights.

“Notwithstanding the economic downturn, the environment is still a pressing concern,” said Shel Bockman of the Institute of Applied Research and Policy Analysis at Cal State San Bernardino, which conducts the annual survey.

Riverside County was included for the first time since 2001, thanks to funding from the Riverside County economic Development Agency and the Green Valley Initiative, which submitted questions relating to environmental issues.

The initiative was launched last year by Ali Sahabi, a Corona developer and owner of the Dos Lagos shopping center, to provide more environmentally friendly technology and building in the region.

Most survey participants said they were doing something to protect the environment whether by recycling (85 percent), conserving water (34 percent) or turning off lights and electrical appliances when not in use (30 percent).

Barbara Sirotnik, one of the poll’s researchers, said the percentage of residents who indicated that their personal finances were better off compared with a year ago was the lowest since the surveys began in 1997. Considering that the price of gasoline has topped the \$4-a-gallon mark since the survey was conducted, Sirotnik said she would expect that the percentage would be even lower today.

Peter Odencrans, spokesman for the Perris-based Eastern Municipal Water District, said people are becoming more aware of their water use but not enough to make a difference yet.

“The bottom line is, we are still seeing water going down driveways, down sidewalks, and into the street in every neighborhood,” he said.

Overall, most residents rated their county as a good place to live, citing location, good climate and affordable housing. Their responses mirrored previous surveys.

The survey revealed very few differences between the residents of each of the two counties except when they were asked what they liked least about the county they lived

in. Crime and gang activity continued to top the list of negative factors for San Bernardino County residents. Traffic was the biggest issue for Riverside County residents.

Researchers said Riverside County responses could be colored by the fact that commuters there travel longer distances and must deal with ongoing road construction, especially the 60/91/25 interchange.

Carl Noblitt, of Menifee, is considering quitting his job near downtown Los Angeles and finding one closer to his home in Riverside County.

A sales manager for a telecommunications company, Noblitt takes the Metrolink and the subway as often as possible.

Ninety-five percent of those surveyed in both counties agreed that Inland leaders need to balance economic development and quality of life for residents.

More than 80 percent in each county said the government should provide incentives for companies to adopt more environmentally friendly technology. Many said they would be willing to pay higher prices to do business with so-called green companies.

When asked the most important environmental issue facing Southern California today, about one-third of the respondents in both counties said air pollution and smog. Nearly one-fourth said the water supply and reservoirs.

The institute surveyed 2,388 people in Riverside and San Bernardino counties in October and November 2007. The margin of error was plus or minus 2 percent.

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