



**American Water**

**Infrastructure, Investment  
and Resiliency**

March 2022

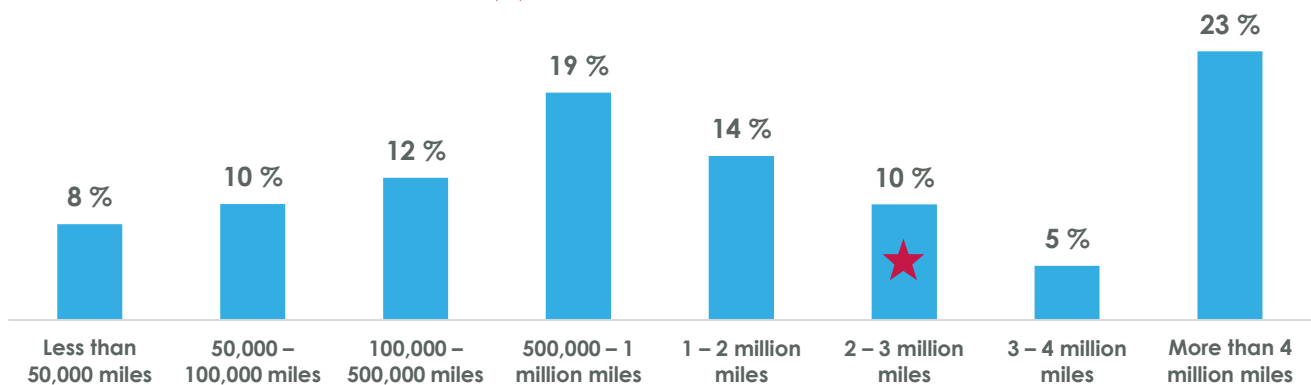
# Americans' knowledge of our water infrastructure system

## Half of Americans underestimate the miles of underground pipes in the US by *a million* or more

The United States' water infrastructure system is comprised of 2.2 million miles of underground pipes, yet Americans are largely unaware of just how much infrastructure goes into a system they rely upon every day.<sup>1</sup> Half (49%) estimate the United States' water infrastructure system is comprised of 1 million miles of underground pipes or less. Three in ten (30%) estimate the miles of underground pipes at 500,000 miles or less. Only 10% of Americans accurately estimated that there are between 2-3 million miles of underground pipes comprising our water infrastructure system in the United States.

### How many miles of underground pipes comprise the United States' water infrastructure system?

★ = correct answer (2.2 million)



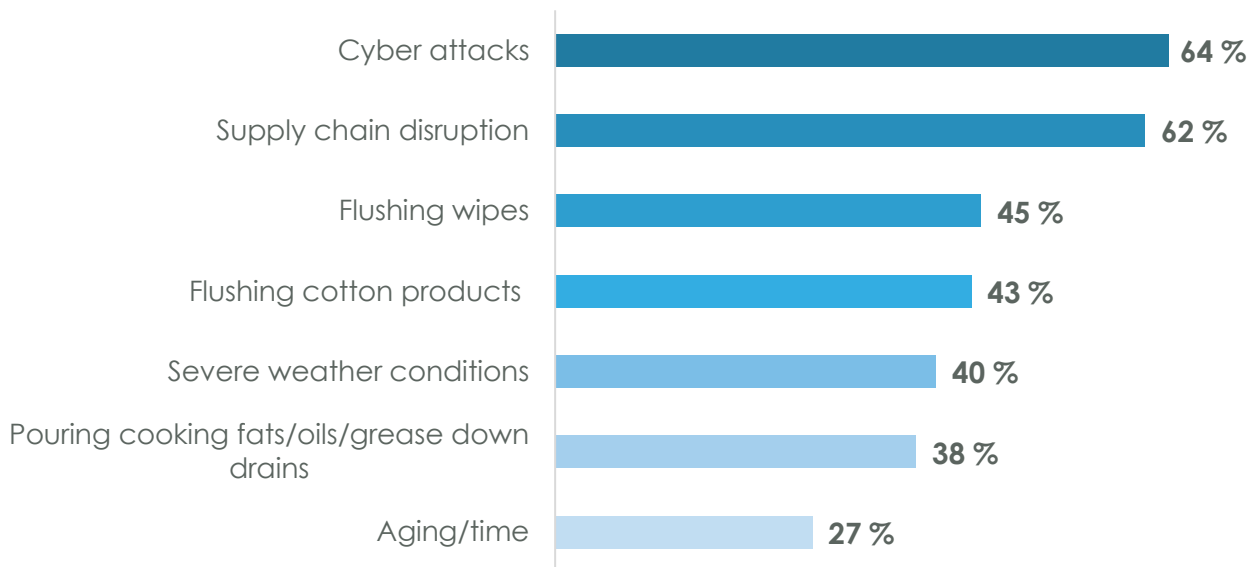
How many miles of underground pipes comprise the United States' water infrastructure system? Please give your best estimate. Base: All respondents (n=2,000)

<sup>1</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Drinking-Water-2021.pdf>

## Over two in five Americans don't know that flushing cotton pads or wipes damages water infrastructure

Over two in five Americans don't know that flushing wipes and cotton products damages our water infrastructure (45% and 43%, respectively). Moreover, 38% of Americans don't know that flushing cooking fats, oils, and grease down the drain negatively impact the condition of underground pipes and water mains. Americans could be unknowingly damaging our water infrastructure system every day by doing these things, which are easily preventable.

### Percentage of Americans who don't know the following negatively impact water infrastructure



*Which of the following do you think negatively impact the condition of the underground pipes and water mains that make up our water infrastructure? Please select all that apply. Base: All respondents (n=2,000)*

Over three in five Americans are unaware that our water infrastructure is susceptible to cyber attacks and supply chain disruptions (64% and 62%, respectively). In addition, younger Americans are less aware of the fact that over time, the condition of underground pipes worsen. 44% of Americans ages 18-24 don't know that aging/time negatively impacts the condition of our water infrastructure, which is much higher than across the general population (27%).

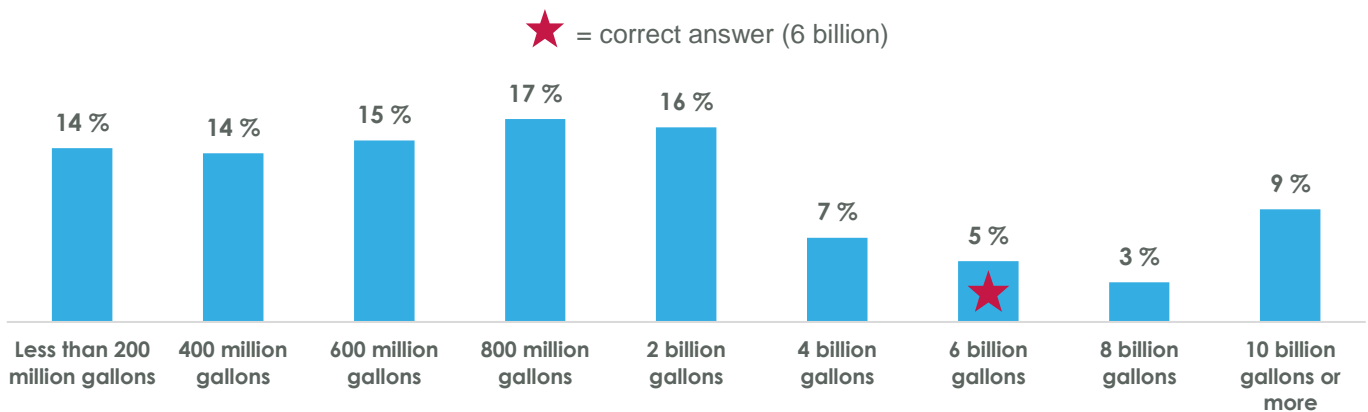
## Did you know a water main break occurs every couple of minutes?

If you were unsure about the question above, you're not alone. Half (53%) of Americans estimate that a water main break occurs every couple of hours or less. In reality, water main breaks occur every

couple of *minutes*.<sup>2</sup> Three in ten (30%) accurately estimated this, while slightly less than one in five (17%) overestimated how frequently they occur, estimating it to be every couple of seconds.

The frequency of water main breaks and pipe leaks, due to aging water infrastructure, causes the United States to lose billions of gallons of water. It's estimated that we're losing an estimated 6 billion gallons of drinking water *each day* due to aging water infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> However, most Americans (60%) estimate the number of gallons of drinking water lost each day is in the millions.

### Which of the following figures indicates how many gallons of drinking water are lost each day due to aging water infrastructure?



Which of the following figures below indicates how many gallons of drinking water are lost each day due to impacts of aging water infrastructure (e.g., water main breaks, continuous leaks, etc.)? Base: All respondents (n=2,000)

## Majority of Americans estimate getting our water infrastructure up to good standards costs \$1 billion or less – it costs \$129 billion

That we're currently losing billions of gallons of drinking water each day due to aging water infrastructure, underscores the reality that much of our nation's water infrastructure needs replacement and investment. To get the United States' water infrastructure up to good standards, it's projected to cost \$129 billion.<sup>4</sup> Over half (56%) of Americans estimate it will cost \$1 billion or less, significantly underestimating the investment needed to continue to have safe, reliable drinking water.

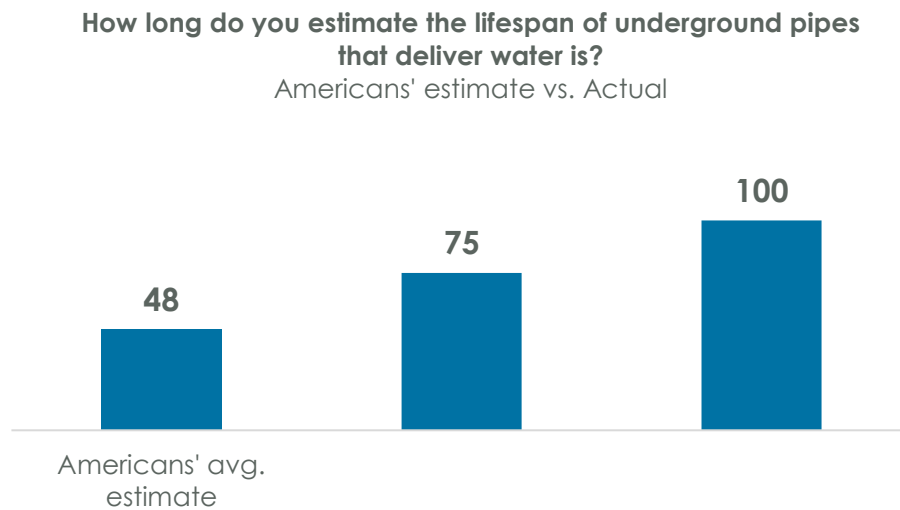
<sup>2</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Drinking-Water-2021.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> [VOW Economic Paper FINAL.pdf \(uswateralliance.org\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [VOW Economic Paper FINAL.pdf \(uswateralliance.org\)](#)

## But our water infrastructure is more resilient than Americans think

On average, Americans estimate the lifespan of underground pipes (i.e., how long they last) is 48 years. In fact, the pipes that deliver water to homes and businesses across the country have an average lifespan of 75 to 100 years.<sup>5</sup>



*Thinking about the underground pipes that deliver water to homes and businesses, how long do you estimate their lifespan is (i.e., how long they last) until they need to be replaced? Base: All respondents (n=2,000)*

Although our water infrastructure is resilient, some of our nation's pipes and water mains were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or post-World War II, meaning they are nearing the end of their lifespan and in need of replacement.<sup>6</sup> But investment in water infrastructure is worthwhile, and can provide safe, reliable water for up to a century given that their lifespan can last up to 100 years.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Drinking-Water-2021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://infrastructurereportcard.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Drinking-Water-2021.pdf>