

Foreword

Still Living Without the Basics in the 21st Century is the culmination of nearly a year of research and analysis that documents the availability of adequate water and sanitation service in U.S. homes. It is based in large part on data from the 2000 decennial census, supplemented by other publicly available information. This publication is a sequel, updating an analysis published in 1995 by the Rural Community Assistance Partnership (RCAP, Inc.) that focused on data from the 1990 decennial census.

In comparing these documents, two points stand out clearly. The efforts of the Rural Community Assistance Partnership – and other agencies and organizations working tirelessly in thousands of small rural communities – have paid off significantly. And still, much remains to be done.

The 1990 census showed that 405,855 rural households lacked complete indoor plumbing. Rural households represented more than half of all U.S. homes that lacked adequate water and sanitation services. By the 2000 census, 226,967 rural households were without complete indoor plumbing, representing about one-third of the national total. This is real progress.

Despite the success to date, more than 600,000 residents of rural communities still do not have the basic water and sanitation services the rest of us take for granted. It is no surprise that they are likely to be economically disadvantaged, ethnic minorities, and geographically isolated.

There is much more to the story, of course. This report also looks at the quality of water and sanitation services and the health consequences of inadequate service. Just as there is much to do, there also is much to learn about the causes and effects of inadequate basic infrastructure.

The research, analysis, and writing for this report was done by Stephen Gasteyer, Ph.D., RCAP's Director of Community Development, and Rahul T. Vaswani, M.A., Research Associate at RCAP. Their work was made possible by grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water as well as U.S. EPA's Office of Wastewater Management and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Utility Service's Water and Environmental Programs.

As a nation, we have succeeded in bringing proper water and sanitation service to almost every home. What's left is likely to be the most difficult part of making water and sanitation services truly universal.

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