

USACE ERDC

Moderator: Julie Marcy
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Julie Marcy: Hello everyone - I'm Julie Marcy from the ERDC Environmental Lab in Vicksburg, Mississippi. At this time, I'm going to put everybody in a listen-only feature that will mute some of our background noise.

Julie Marcy: Welcome to the third in a series of harmful algal bloom webinars sponsored by the ERDC Water Operations Technical Support Aquatic Plant Control Research and Aquatic Nuisance Species Research Programs. This series of web meetings is being held in conjunction with a workshop at the Portland District and the web meetings will be recorded and archived on the WOTS and Invasive Species pages that are shown on our introductory slide. And with that - just a few logistical notes before we begin.

If you have a question during the presentation - if you would use the chat to enter the question and send it to everyone so we can see it. Following Nate's presentation I'll return everyone to interactive mode. You may still need to do a star 6 to unmute yourself at that time. Remember not to put us on hold with background music and it looks like everybody has done a good job of signing in so I can see where you are to account for our attendees. So thank you for that.

And at this time, I'll give you today's speaker on External Communication and Media Issues - Mr. Nate Herring. Nate is a Public Affairs Specialist with the Corps' middle-east district in Winchester, Virginia. He was a Public Affairs Specialist at the Tulsa district in 2011 when the district experienced

significant algal blooms in several lakes simultaneously. And Nate is kind enough to be with us today to share that experience and some of the lessons learned from it with us.

So Nate with that I'm going to give you presenter rights and you should have control of the slides now and can switch to your presentation. Remember to do the star six to unmute.

Nate Herring: Good morning everyone - hopefully everyone can hear me.

Nate Herring: There we go - all right let's get started here. As Julie had said my name is Nate Herring. I'm currently at the Middle-East district in the Public Affairs Office, but I was at the Tulsa district for the last three and a half years and during that time in 2011 we dealt with significant algal blooms in several lakes simultaneously, which created quite the issue with communications and dealing with the media because it was one of the first times the district had to deal with something especially to that extent.

So what I'd like to do today is just give a little introduction and share some of the best practices that I've learned when dealing with blue green algae and then walk through what we've dealt with in Tulsa and then finally do a little bit of lessons learned and give some recommendations that I would suggest your district does if you have to deal with significant algal blooms and communicating with the public and media. And then I'd be happy to take any questions. And also - if you have any questions throughout the presentation feel free.

So just to start off - a couple of things just wanted to put out there right away is when you're dealing with anything that has to do somewhat scientific or technical - simple is better. So try to use language when dealing with the

public or the media that simplifies it as much as possible. And I know that's sometimes difficult - especially if you're used to dealing in technical terms, but trying to communicate something that is very technical sometimes gets lost in translation.

And when you're dealing with anything that has to do with health or safety of individuals - it's very difficult not to create a panic. And that's something that we've seen in Tulsa with people hearing this message and then blowing it out of proportion to the point that it created this huge panic and then media even sensationalized it further.

A key to remember is that people often hear what they want to hear and not really what you mean. And what I mean by that is sometimes when you try to communicate things - if people have preconceived notions of what it means or if you say - use keywords like dangerous or harmful - a lot of times people take that and think if I dipped my toe in the water it's going to fall off and that may not be what you're trying to communicate, but sometimes that's what happens and it creates an issue.

Finally, and I put this in bold because it's very important - engage your public affairs office early. The sooner the better. If you know that there might be an issue or even if your lakes are in conditions that may be susceptible to a harmful algal bloom - get your communications and public affairs office engaged early because they can develop communication plans and reach out to other districts that may have dealt with this in the past - that way they can share best practices and learn so that hopefully you can avoid some of the issues that we ran into in the Tulsa district. So without further ado I'd just like to do a brief walkthrough of what we dealt with in Tulsa.

In 2011 we had high levels of blue-green algae in several of the lakes within the Tulsa district - many of them in Oklahoma. We haven't seen that high of levels in that many lakes at the same time - now Tulsa has had blooms in the past, but never to that extent.

One of the keys to this whole issue was that Oklahoma did not have any state guidance at that point - Kansas did. The Southwestern portion of Kansas fell into the Tulsa district and they did have guidance and we - the state took the lead. The Kansas Department of Health and Environment was the lead agency and we followed their guidance and they were the lead on the communication.

Since Kansas already having a policy - what Oklahoma - or what that the Tulsa district tried to do in Oklahoma was adapt the signs that Kansas had used and there were two levels - advisory, which was triggered if cell counts reached 20,000 or greater and a warning, which was triggered when it hit 100,000 or greater. Now these signs worked well in Kansas, but not necessarily in the Tulsa district.

There were a couple of differences which I think contributed to the fact that the signs and the communications between Kansas and Oklahoma was different. Oklahoma lakes tended to be in more populated areas - a lot of Kansas is fairly rural. Many of the Oklahoma lakes support large resorts and businesses and that was one of the big pushback that we had was the different businesses and resorts having issue with the way it was communicated.

And finally, a lot of people come in from out of town to the Oklahoma lakes whereas a lot of the Kansas lakes tended to be local populations that had come. And because this was a new issue in Oklahoma people didn't really know how to respond to it. In Kansas it's something that they've been dealing with for several years.

Now with the signs, I have highlighted here a couple of words that were used in the advisory and warning signs that really got people upset. And the words were things like “lake may be unsafe for people and pets” or “lake unsafe for people and pets” and then also the word “prohibited” on the warning sign - “Swimming, water skiing and water contract is prohibited.” Any time you hear unsafe or prohibited it gives you the tendency to think really negative - and that’s not necessarily what we want people to do.

We want them to use caution and we want them to be aware, but we don’t want to panic people and when you hear the word prohibited - and one of the pushback we got was what does prohibited mean? Does it mean if I go in the water - if I’m caught doing these activities will I get in trouble? Will I get fined? Will I get arrested? Well we weren’t really enforcing it, but that’s what the connotation was with using these signs. To stay consistent with what the wording on the signs was - in our media releases that we sent out to all the media in the effected areas we used the words discouraged and prohibited as well.

So that, again, caused people to look at those words and have negative connotations and negative views. And, of course, when you send something out to the media they’re looking to sell their newspaper or get viewers. And sometimes they sensationalize things and I’d like to demonstrate that in a second, but first, another thing that we sent out with our media releases - because we had so many areas effected at one time we would send out this chart staying consistent with the words of discouraged and prohibited - the different areas that were effected. And that worked a little bit to clear up some of the confusion on the different areas effected, but the media still took it and kind of fed into the panic.

So just to demonstrate some of the media response that we had - an example would be here - they were using words like sickening slime or off limits. Well - when you hear the term off limits the first thing you think of is even though it says off limits for swimming - the lake is closed. And that's not what we wanted to portray.

Another example - dangerous blue-green algae. Again, yes - it could cause health effects, but dangerous is not a very positive term and not the term that we want people to hear because then it causes panic. Beware of blue-green algae.

Now I purposefully included the sub-headline on this because the headline was beware of blue-green algae - low water levels, but the second sub-headline might of low water levels and rise of blue-green algae officials are urging visitors in Oklahoma to use caution. Well that is the message we wanted to portray. Using caution and knowing and education is what we wanted to portray, but people are seeing this headline and they're getting this image of, you know, really bad stuff that is causing people to panic.

A couple more examples - I wanted to include this one where they say if people touch the algae it can cause vomiting, skin rashes in some cases even be fatal. That - people are then were calling and saying well if I put my toe in the water is it going to fall off? Am I going to die? Well - there's a lot more to it that people weren't seeing it, but the media was really making it almost to the point that people were just panicking.

Another example - potentially deadly lake bacteria. They were using these terms that just caused panic among the public. And finally - Texas Lake has been declared off limits to swimming - again, people were thinking the lake is

closed and that's one of the biggest issues that we had was people thinking that the entire lake was closed not just to certain activities.

Social media was no different. We had a variety of responses on the Tulsa district Facebook page, which was our main social media site. This is an example of how we had some people writing in and being helpful and providing us where they thought they saw blue-green algal blooms and this individual was reporting suspected blooms in a certain area of a Keystone lake in Oklahoma.

A lot of people that were calling wanted just general information - what happens if we go swimming? Is the - just wanting information about the effects and everything that was going on and that's the majority of what we've seen. However, there are some people that took it to the extreme and, you know, they weren't happy by it and they would have images and things like this as an example of that.

They would also just be bashing the Corps and we'd have a lot of people, as an example, at the top hand corner of the slide people were just blaming the Corps for ruining their fun and that it was all blown out of proportion and it was nothing to be worried about. And the new did have some people that came and really (unintelligible) were thankful for the messages that we were trying to put out.

Finally, rumors - rumors was something that we really struggled with in this whole issue was because media and people were hearing what they wanted to hear. And, again, that's a key message I hope you take away is people sometimes will hear things on the radio or the news and they're going to interpret it how they want to or how they think they should. And this instance we had a news station - people were hearing that the lake was closed and what

they were actually saying is it is closed to swimming or water contact is prohibited, but a lot of people were calling and they were saying the lake is closed and they were canceling their reservations and they were upset that the lake was closed especially before a major holiday.

Some of the unintended effects of the portrayal in the media and with the way it was communicated was businesses claiming loss of revenue and their impact to the businesses that were around the lake. A lot of them were saying that around the holidays people were canceling their reservations or they were not going to the lakes. So we were having pushback from that and, of course, when businesses push back elected officials also were getting involved. And they were upset with the way the response was.

So one of the things that the Tulsa did was adjust the signs. And this is an early adaptation of the sign and the major thing one - is the orange, but also as the advisory sign said until further notice contact with the water is not recommended. So they took off the word prohibited to kind of clarify that and this was the same language that was used on the advisory sign.

And then later on it went to a more informational sign rather than dictating what people should do. So in this it is elevated risk of health effects and giving some of the recommendations as well as places to get more information.

One of the major issues that we had was a county down the Texas side of Lake Texoma - Grayson County. They did not like what the Corps was doing and I had gotten a call early in the onset of this from a gentlemen from the health department there who was asking what you do, what information can he help us disseminate and it was a really great relationship.

About maybe a month or so later in the summer when it really started hitting - the lake got heavily impacted, the businesses were being effected - a judge by the name of (Drew Bynum) had called me and was very upset and disagreed with the way the Corps was handling the situation and he was going to hold a press conference.

And he did that - and at that press conference - for lack of a better explanation - he pretty much told people that it's safe to go in the water and go right ahead the Corps is full of it and just go have fun. And they caused some issues because the public then was confused. They didn't know who to believe. Do they believe the local county health department or do they believe big government Corps of engineers, which is some of the comments that I received.

Again, people are going to hear what they want to hear. They - a lot of people latched on to what the health department was saying and then that's what they went with and discredited the information coming out from the Corps. Now one of the things that (Grayson) County does - and I believe they still do - is they test based on toxins - not cell counts. Because they believe that cell counts were not an accurate way to measure risk.

So they were testing just on toxins, which is different than what the Corps was doing. So that was a lot of where the discrepancies were coming. Well that was some of the first political pressure, but then it became even more widespread when some state legislature - officials decided to pass a bill - house bill 259, which directed the Oklahoma Department of Tourism to develop a website that reported on blue-green algae and water quality at the different lakes in the state.

They tasked the Department to come up with different language to be used widely. Now, because it's a state agency it mandated that state lakes and agencies follow it, but, of course, the Corps of engineers - a federal agency - didn't have to, but because our policy was to follow state guidelines in Kansas we would also do the same in Oklahoma as well.

One of the things that it required was for in order an advisory to be issued the World Health Organization's guideline of 100,000 cells per milliliter and 20,000 micrograms per liter of microcystin had to be met. Well, of course, as a community that knows a lot about these blooms - that creates problems because you have more toxins that may be produced besides microcystin. So that created the issue of how do you communicate everything and the Corps's policy then became - send the information to the state and the state is the one to do the communications through their website.

Now the website they developed is called checkmyoklake.com and this is a screenshot of the website. It does have some good information - it really does and it takes an educational approach, which is in hindsight the way that we would have been best served to have gone as well by providing the information because as this evolved the stance of the Tulsa District eventually took was here is the information - here's all the facts you need to know about blue-green algae - now you need to make the best decision for you and your family.

And that became the key message that we ended up going with and taking that educational approach. And it worked better - it probably would have been served better working early on in the issue as well. For each individual lake as they tested - they then put out a message about when the testing was done, what the results are - if it had high-cell counts and what the toxins were if they have toxin testing results.

At each one of the lakes they had a sign - most on the boat ramps and then the access areas - for the Oklahoma tourism department's tagline, which is "if it's green on top stop." And it's a catchy little phrase - it does get stuck in people's minds, of course, the scientific community I'm sure would argue that there are blooms that are sub-surface that aren't covered in this and it's not the catch all be all rule, but it is a good start with getting people thinking of well, you know, if I see scum I shouldn't go in that area and urges people to be aware. And it also has a QR code to access the website from a smartphone to check the lake conditions when you're actually out there.

There is a sign - it's changed - it's very similar to the advisory sign that was there. It just informs of the adverse health effects - this is posted on, I believe, on a case-by-case basis depending on the cell counts or levels or in the event of an advisory.

And finally, I just wanted to go over a few lessons that we learned from dealing with this and then I'd be happy to take any questions and I want to leave ample time for discussion. One of the keys was, of course, as I discussed is the wording. The wording of the original signs and once that was out there it's very hard to take back and that was what is in people's minds - the unsafe, the prohibited, the dangerous - that the media was putting out. Those type words - they going on to number two - it caused panic and it caused people to really not know how to deal with it and not necessarily be informed, but go on the - I don't know all the facts, but I'm just going to panic.

One of the keys that need to happen and I think that we did an okay job of this, but it probably could have happened in more of an extent is engaging the stakeholders early and when I say stakeholders I'm talking about local businesses, elected officials, politicians - all those kind of things and by doing

so you are able to get them to help you educate. Because by explaining to them as community leaders they will then help to disseminate the right information out to the people and get it in the people early on - especially if it's the first time your district is really dealing with this issue.

Also, holding public meetings early. This is something that we didn't do and as the issue exploded - by doing so it would have been not a good situation by putting our commander or Corps employees out in the public that was already seething mad and upset about this whole situation. It probably would have ended badly. So - but doing that early when you're just trying to get the public understanding of this - it's probably a good idea.

Educating versus dictate - it's - what I've found is one of the biggest lessons learned is coming out with an educational approach and here's all the facts - here's everything you need to know - you need to make the best decision. Because people are going to do what they want to do regardless. They're either going to defy it or they're going to head the warnings. By putting an education rather than saying it's prohibited or trying to dictate and tell people what they should or shouldn't do. That was really where we became some of the issues.

Catching the rumors early - this is difficult, but really monitoring and finding out what the media is saying. If they do have an area trying to correct that as early as possible before it spreads. And finally - and this one is very important - is speaking with one voice. Everyone from the administrators and the admin help at the lakes - that answer the phones to the rangers to the lake manager to the actual people in the district. Everyone should be talking with the same talking points and we came up with talking points and messages and question and answers because having that consistent answer to the same question is key. Whether it be media or whether it be members of the public - if they're

calling three different lakes they really should be getting the same information from those three different lakes.

So with that I wanted to leave ample time for discussion and for questions. So I'll open it up at this point.

Julie Marcy: Okay - so everyone can ask questions now - either verbally or using the chat, but remember you may still need to do a star six on your individual phone to unmute yourself.

(Dave): I have a quick question - did you have a phone number that was specific for Corps of Engineers questions? Was that setup early in the process or did that come along as the issues unfolded?

Nate Herring: Now are you talking about specifically for blue-green algae?

(Dave): Correct.

Nate Herring: No, not at that point. That is something that would have been a good idea - a dedicated line. We did have a lake level line that was similar, but really the individual lakes were fielding the questions and one of the issues we ran into was the district main line and the lakes line were getting absolutely inundated with questions and a lot of it was simply, "what areas are effected". So I'm sure a line like you're mentioning would be very helpful.

Julie Marcy: Any additional questions for Nate from either Portland or online folks? Again, if the folks can move close to the phone that makes it easier for us to hear.

(Dave): Yes - all right. I can make one observation on this in having gone through a very similar drill when I was with the South Florida Water Management

District - we had blooms on Lake Okeechobee and they provoked the same kind of media frenzy and the same kind of panics that you're talking about Nate.

(Dave): So I'm very sympathetic with that and we went through several years of evolution figuring out how to, you know, effectively communicate with signage and things like that. And I'll second what you said - it's exactly right - take an educational stance. Putting out the information. We actually put out a weekly map showing the effected. That proved to be very helpful - it was extremely expensive, but it seemed to be helpful for our PR and for keeping the public informed. So - yes I think that method works. It certainly does work. And how far you can go with it depends on the resources.

The other thing that we found very important there that you also pointed out is that it was important that the management - or the district in that case - not be blindsided by this stuff. And that they know - as soon as we start seeing something coming, we could push it up the chain and say, you know, here's something happening. In our case we had seen it before, so it wasn't like reinventing the wheel, but still it was very important to keep them informed and in the loop.

Nate Herring: Yes - that really is key. You know, I think we had never dealt with it to the extent; - I'm sure (Tony Clyde) can vouch for this, that blooms were not uncommon, but to this many lakes at one time - almost everyone in our district and the public had heard of blue-green algae after that summer. Before then, it was something that unless you lived or went to that individual lake that was affected previously you probably weren't aware of it.

(Dave): Well let me throw a question out to you - were you able to get the resources you needed? It sounds like you did - to mobilize and kind of get all this

information, your Facebook page and all that kind of stuff, clicking in a timely fashion?

Nate Herring: Well we were lucky in the fact that our Facebook page had been established and had quite the following ahead of time. So people were using it as a resource and all of our press releases directed people to our Facebook and to our website and we were telling people to keep checking there and directing people because that became one of our best communication tools.

So I would say the key is having these resources in place before anything like this happens. We see this a lot with disaster communications - districts that have a Facebook page or social media presence or this type of communication infrastructure setup before hand will be a lot more successful because they are not trying to promote it at the time. These situations really do snowball - as soon as someone sees it on there they're going to share it and then the next person will end up joining and you will get a snowball effect. I think on Facebook we saw maybe 1000-2000 people joining. The majority of people came during the blue-green algae blooms to get information about that.

(Dave): Now in the Tulsa case - did you have a good structure in place at the beginning to make sure that, the various rangers and whatnot knew that here is the "party line" if you will, and here's who to direct people to with questions, and that kind of thing?

Nate Herring: No - and that was part of the issue in communications - we hadn't dealt with it before, so when it started popping up we hadn't really had anything in place. We hadn't had any communication plan or key messages - everything was developed on the fly because it's just something that had never been that big of an issue nor something we ever anticipated becoming this big of an issue. So no - to answer your question we didn't have that. It was - really everything

was developed on the fly and adjusted as needed based on the response. And, of course, it got out of control before we really had a handle on it.

(Dave): Yes. Let me ask this; who, if anyone, were you able to reach out to in that time of crisis for any guidance as far as signage and things like that and communication? It sounds like you might have had to reinvent a lot of it as you went along.

Nate Herring: We did - of course for the signage was our operation division and (Tony)'s folks that had really worked on the signage - especially adopting it from Kansas. We had borrowed a lot from them and then just doing research as far as what other state agencies and other Corps districts that may have dealt with it, but the unique thing about Oklahoma was just the fact that we were having these huge bloom without any type of state guidance and at first the state agencies just did not want to mess with it. They were – “you guys handle it - we don't want any part of it”. They were involved, but for the communications aspects they kind of wanted the backseat on it.

(Dave): Yes - so it was not a case of picking up the phone and knowing who to call?

Nate Herring: Exactly - that's exactly right.

(Dave): Okay.

(Tony): Hey Nate - this is (Tony)?

Nate Herring: Hey (Tony)!

(Dave): Can you hear him? Okay...

Nate Herring: Yes, I can hear him.

(Tony): What we did was exactly what we did beginning in 2004 with (Marion Reservoir). We adopted WHO guidelines - we went out and developed signage. Prior to 2010 (KDHE, Kansas Department of Health and Environment developed a BGA workgroup that was an outgrowth of other meetings—Tulsa District and the Kansas City district were represented there (at the meetings/workshops). (Charles Hall, I believe,) represented Kansas City district, but we had direct input into the development of the signs, which is why it was so easy to go and grab them. (At the Tulsa District) we said that's fine - that's great. That's what we were doing anyway.

And it was just a different pushback and what Nate did in our Oklahoma portion of our area, our lakes are very close to populated areas, particularly in Eastern Oklahoma. And the first substantial blooms that year in 2011 wasn't a Corps lake is was Grand Lake which is a Grand River Dam Authority Lake. So there - it was - once we started getting pushback in Oklahoma it was a fly by the seat of our pants - try to amend the signs to make the language a little less prohibitive.

Because what we were getting back was also from the ranger Corps - it says prohibited. Is it a title 36 violation or is it not, but I'll tell you and I keep forgetting (the name of the lake, I think the lake that had the 100,000 micrograms per liter (of microcystin) KDHE shut that down and Kansas City district were able to do that on the Kansas River.

There were people who insisted on leaving it out and they asked (KDHE) and I don't think they were cited, but the rangers called in the sheriff and they drove around the lake trying to see where these folks were going to take their boat out and get off the lake and they put them in safe boats, but Corps approached them, got them out of the boats and off the water. I don't know what happened to them, but they were told this is closed - this is a law enforcement closure. If you do this again a bad thing will happen to you kind of thing, but they got a good talking to because there were multiple dog deaths and human illnesses during this bloom event.

It is sort of fly by the seat of your pants - it just depended on what part of the (unintelligible) you were on.

(Dave): It sounds like - the way I'm interpreting this is - okay, so for your routine, and there's no such thing as a routine bloom I guess, but on the technical level for more routine situations you guys had your act together for sure. And you actually are in pretty good shape while things remain within the normal realm of experience as far as blooms go.

But what triggered the problem here is this thing blew up- this is almost a disaster management situation erupting on you. Because it was outside the realm of the routine summer bloom kind of thing and that's what you weren't quite ready for, not prepared for that level of disaster if you will. And it could have been a lot worse - I mean you could have had people dropping dead at four or five of these lakes at the same time and that would have been even another step beyond - that would have almost been a FEMA situation.

But yes - so you weren't quite - no one would be quite prepared for that level of explosion. So - but it sounds like (Tony) had done a lot of the legwork upfront so you weren't totally unprepared.

Nate Herring: Yes - absolutely. I fully agree. On the technical side it was just because it was such an unprecedented event and you had so much going on at one time that from the communication aspect you had so much going and it hitting almost every part of the state. So instead of just communicating in individual areas you were having messages that were going wide.

So everyone in the state was hearing it and blue-green algae became the kind of the buzzword for the year. And then you had people getting panicked. And of course with Kansas, which was where you had a lot of the significant blooms applying the signs as (Tony) had mentioned - we weren't really anticipating or knowing how the wide response was going to be and that's I think what caught us really off guard is not knowing what the pushback was going to be and I think we received a lot more pushback than what we could even imagine.

(Dave): Yes - let me ask the crowd here in a more general way - are there any other districts that ever experience anything on this level or magnitude as far as a public panic or media frenzy?

Julie Marcy: And (Dave) if folks could move closer to the phone - that would help with the recording so that we can hear them clearly.

(Dave): Okay.

Man: We've had spikes where somebody did a report on something and then the worst thing is if they try to could call me directly and try to get information from me. I try to make sure it goes through the public affairs office first and that way it gives me some time to determine how I'm going to handle the

request. And have somebody review it before it goes out, - but, yes - it's usually an isolated spike.

Kathryn: You know, we'll get events- there will be a couple articles in the newspaper from time to time or I'll get cold calls - actually I just got one a couple of weeks ago from a community that's outside of Dexter Reservoir in the town of Lowell, Oregon. And their city council actually gave someone responsibility of contacting the Corps to find out what we're going to do to manage algae blooms next to the reservoir.

Jane Dalglish: Yes - he really likes his own voice. So there's some good points that come out of it, but - that's something down in the Southern Willamette valley that we deal with, but not on a frequent basis, but we do have those that - like I mentioned before, our problem is when signs get put up by the county or somebody else and we're not notified on our lakes. That's where we end up running into this problem. We get hit blindsided and not knowing that there was a test done and that something was found and then we're left not knowing how to communicate because we didn't know there was something communicated.

(Dave): Do your rangers generally know that when something like this comes up to call you guys or whoever they should call in events like this?

Kathryn: The rangers usually deal with the situation on their own. We communicate to folks here at the district and we communicate with the rangers, but they have a good handle on their community and their lakes and technical things. Now we - when we wrote our policy back in 2009 we did have - we did have a coordinated effort and there's a calling tree. PAO was involved in that. And that - those sort of legacy agreements carried us through until now and

although we are changing how we handle HABs, I think there still is an good infrastructure for talking with one another.

(Dave): The reason I'm bringing this up, and Nate you can chime in on this, - and (Erich Emery) brought this up last night in a slightly different context where it wasn't a ranger involved, but you have a local project person there spouting their own opinions about things and next thing you know, that becomes the Corps line - or worse yet, people are taking action based on what that person said and they really had no authority to speak that way.

And so I'm wondering, you know, what's the tenor out there among rangers and others, you know, when something like this happens. You don't start spouting off your own opinion - you really need to make sure you know what you're talking about.

Nate Herring: And that's one of the issues that we had where coming up with the talking points and the standardized questions to what the - we found are the most commonly asked questions and your key messages were really important and getting them in the hands of every ranger and everyone that may have the possibility of speaking on this topic.

By making sure they stick to the (unintelligible) - and a lot of our rangers were really good at that without doing that once they knew what to say and once they had the Corp's messages in their hands. They were really good at staying on topic, but it was getting those approved messages out there for everyone to know what to say. And coaching them on here is the kinds of things that we prefer you say and try to avoid.

And one of those that we always do as far as - we give all of our rangers media training - beyond just blue-green algae, but just in general when they

come on board they go through a media training class that Public Affairs holds. And in that class one of the keys is that you're speaking on behalf of the government - especially if you're dealing with media that you have to keep your own opinions out of it. And they're coached very early on in their ranger tenure to do that.

So we haven't really dealt with that a whole lot, but making sure they have the key messages and everyone is speaking with one voice has been absolutely invaluable when communicating this.

(Dave): Yes - have another question or two.

Nate Herring: Sure.

JJ Baum: There is a need to sit down with the PAO person directly - if you're in a hurry you're wanting to respond to things and just like your comments Nate - people hear what they want to hear. Sometimes our PAO people will hear we're going to test for something and they promise things that we really can't do. We don't know what the exact problem is.

JJ Baum: They picked up that we might be able to test for it when we really didn't say that - we say that, you know, we test various parameters around the lake and we'll look for things. And it created this false impression that we could exactly diagnose what the problem was and it just makes a huge difference when you sit down and take your time versus, you know, just quick phone calls and everything like that.

Nate Herring: Yes and that's engaging internally - getting everyone around the table and discussing early on is important as well. (Tony) and I became very good friends during this whole issue. He was in my office almost every single day

or I'd go up to him or we'd be on the phone and trying to get the facts straight on everything because - something to keep in mind when - I know I'm guilty of this as a Public Affairs - I'm not technical.

Sometimes it's a misunderstanding because when I talk to engineers or people on the scientific or technical community - sometimes the language gets (unintelligible) and my understanding is not quite as in-depth as I would like it to be and sometimes it's a matter of what I try to do is repeat it back because I just might not be getting it.

And I think it's taking the time and trying to make sure that it's engrained and putting it down in writing in these key messages and talking points and making sure all the facts are straight and having it reviewed by everyone that needs to see it and that has a slice of the pie - is really, really important. You can do it quickly, but you need to take the time in order to do it as quickly as possible, but you are absolutely right - making sure that to take the time and get the right message out there is important.

Tina Lundell: I was just going to mention that the [Portland] District applies guidelines from OHA - The Oregon health authority. They provide signs and they have their number on there. So there's a lot of calls that go through them so that helps us a little bit too. And then like even if we don't have an advisory we get low counts - we should - often we call them and let them know what's going on that hey there's some, but you know, the numbers came back low. So they're not getting contacted to post an advisory, but it's helpful for them to know the status of the beach and so when they get calls from someone, they have at least heard for us.

(Dave): Yes - go ahead.

Man: Nate did this event spur on any FOIA requests, either after the fact or during? When things get in the public eye people start getting interested whether it's the local businesses.

Nate Herring: I would assume it did - I'm not 100% certain. (Tony) may know that better than I do because I imagine he would be involved in answering some of those.

(Dave): I can make one other little question to you Nate and see if this actually occurred in your case.

Nate Herring: Sure.

(Dave): Back to the South Florida situation - there we had a situation that was chronic essentially. I mean it was year after year. It was always going to happen - every summer, and summer in South Florida is kind of nine months out of the year, but anyway, it became so chronic that we ended up cultivating some pretty close relations with some of the media reporters because they were the same people, you know, they had that environmental beat that was covered by certain reporters and you'd see them at all the meetings all the time and after awhile you'd read their articles in the paper every other day or whatever and so after awhile you'd just be talking one on one.

It was an unusual situation because the technical people there would sometimes talk one on one with reporters and it'd take you about a year sometimes to educate these reporters up to the point where they could speak intelligently about what was going on. And usually about that time they got moved off the beat, but that was very useful, but it was an extremely large investment on part of the staff to cultivate that kind of an educational program with the reporters and they had to be willing to do it too.

Nate Herring: Absolutely - and here's something I noticed - the Tulsa district is a fairly large area. The Tulsa media was not really the media that we had as much problem with because we dealt with them so frequently that the relationships were already there - that they weren't in a rush just to get something out. They would actually take the time to learn everything. Some of the other media that we hadn't dealt with as much - those were the ones that would really - really come out.

Now Texoma - our lake office there has wonderful relationships with the local media and they - at first it was difficult just because the messages that we were putting out did help to foster that sense of panic because of using those terms like unsafe and prohibited. So the media was running with that and that was already out there and we saw that, but yes - cultivating relationships is really important and you do work with the same reporters over and over, but having that clear message from the beginning is - and being prepared is really the key and I think that that's one thing that we lacked in because we were - weren't expecting to have to communicate this on this large of a scale and we didn't have the messages down the way we should have - at least from the communication standpoint.

Julie Marcy: Any other questions for Nate?

(Dave): It's pretty quiet here in Portland.

Julie Marcy: Okay - well Nate we certainly appreciate your giving us such an outstanding program and sharing all the lessons learned that you had with us. That's very helpful. Be aware that around 12:30 Central or 10:30 Pacific time, we'll have our final webinar in this series on the Evolution and Development of the LRD-HAB Response Strategy with (Erich Emery) and (Jade Young). And for

folks - both in Portland and online I will be closing out this meeting in order to separate our files, but then I will reactive it.

So, you may need to call back in, but if you do disconnect you will just need to reactivate using the same codes. It just allows me to separate our recordings. With that - Nate did you have anything else to add?

Nate Herring: No - the only thing I will add is I'm in the global if anyone would like to reach out to me or have any additional questions that you think of coming up. (Tony) is a good resource as well as Tulsa, but feel free to send me an email or give me a call and I'd be happy to try and answer any questions that I can.

Julie Marcy: Okay - thank you so much and that will conclude our session.

END