

West Coast Regional Harmful Algal Bloom Summit February 10-12, 2009

Public Session on February 12th from 5 - 7pm



Why are Harmful Algal Blooms a Problem on the West Coast?

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are a global threat to living resources and human health, and have had significant impacts on the California, Oregon, and Washington coastal communities for decades. HABs close beaches to recreational razor clam harvesting, make Dungeness crabs too toxic to eat, close mussel and oyster beds to recreational and commercial harvesting, and cause the death of marine mammals and pelicans. These problems are widespread and often extend beyond state boundaries.

Two HAB organisms occurring on the West Coast produce toxins that can accumulate in shellfish and cause human illness or death if consumed. In 2002-2003, toxic algae caused razor clam and Dungeness crab fishery closures in Washington resulting in \$10-12 million in lost revenue, and a razor clam fishery closure at Clatsop Beach, Oregon, cost the local communities \$4.8 million. Toxic algae have also led to more than 14,000 sick or dead seals, sea lions, sea otters, dolphins, birds, and gray whales along the California shoreline and other parts of the West Coast over the last decade. These effects have not only resulted in economic losses, but also in an erosion of community identity, community recreation, and a traditional way of living for native coastal cultures.

The Purpose of the West Coast HAB Summit

Because the same HAB organisms cause problems along the entire West Coast, a regional approach to predicting and monitoring HABs is needed to protect human health and marine resources. Recognizing this need, the West Coast Governors' Agreement (WCGA) on Ocean Health called for a HAB workshop in their draft Action Plan "to reach consensus on the present state-of-knowledge and prioritize the information needed by decision makers to lessen the impacts of HAB events on humans and critical marine resources."

In support of the WCGA, NOAA partnered with the West Coast states to convene the West Coast Regional Harmful Algal Bloom Summit on February 10-12, 2009 in Portland, Oregon. This Summit brought together experts to assess the causes of HABs and develop a plan for research and management actions necessary to lessen the impacts of this serious threat to water quality, living resources, and coastal communities. This meeting was built upon more than 10 years of NOAA support for HAB research and management on the West Coast.



Outcomes of the Summit

Eighty leading scientists, managers, and industry representatives came together for the first time and endorsed the WCGA call for a West Coast regional HAB monitoring, alert and response network and forecasting system.

Seizing on the opportunities of new and emerging technologies, this system will provide advanced early warning of HABs, minimize fishery closures, protect the economy of coastal communities, mitigate the impacts to marine life and continue to protect public health.

The next step will be to incorporate outcomes from the workshop into a plan for implementing this monitoring and forecasting system, and to present this plan to the WCGA.

West Coast HAB Summit Public Session

The results of the Summit were presented at a public session on February 12th, from 5:00pm – 7:00pm. This public meeting gave representatives from the Summit a chance to share with the public plans for mitigating the impacts of HABs on the West Coast through a united effort across state boundaries. The public and media also had a chance to provide feedback to the West Coast HAB community and hear about the scope of the problem.

For more information about this effort go to:
http://www.cop.noaa.gov/west_coast_summit

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