

OHIO RIVER VALLEY WATER SANITATION COMMISSION

**Roundtable Issues Forum
Embassy Suites Buffalo
Buffalo, New York
Wednesday, October 7, 2015
1:00 to 2:00 PM EST**

Chairman Conroe called the Roundtable of Commissioners meeting to order at 1:00 P.M. Wednesday, October 7, 2015. The Roundtable agenda was set to cover ORSANCO's monitoring of the 2015 harmful algal bloom (HAB) on the Ohio River and a review of the response to the HAB.

2015 Ohio River Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) Monitoring and Response Review

After a welcome and introduction of new commissioners, Commissioner Conroe stated that the Roundtable would be shortened from the planned 1.5 hours to 1 hour to allow sufficient time for the Executive Conference of Commissioners scheduled to follow. Commissioner Conroe then introduced Executive Director Richard Harrison following a brief mention that the Roundtable discussion would be an opportunity to guide ORSANCO commissioners and staff in determining the role the agency should be play regarding future HAB events.

Mr. Harrison clarified that this Roundtable would focus primarily on ORSANCO's response to the HAB and staff's efforts in the matter and feedback on communication during the event, and not necessarily on technical matters related to the event. Mr. Harrison then described the evolution of staff's communication efforts throughout the event and solicited feedback on what staff did well and what could have been done better, including how ORSANCO-collected data and those collected by other entities should have been compiled and shared. Lines of communication during the event were two-fold, involving both technical information dissemination as well as coordination with the public information officers from the states. Mr. Harrison then turned the discussion over to Greg Youngstrom of staff to inform the commissioners of the current status of the event.

Mr. Youngstrom mentioned that the most downstream extent of the event was recorded at river mile 720 with some localized occurrences being reported in the Evansville, IN area. Crews currently en-route to that area to investigate the HAB mentioned observing more turbid conditions on the river which should hinder future algal activity. Plans called for a meeting of the states and other stakeholders the following week to discuss how and when to conclude activities associated with the bloom. Mr. Harrison and Commissioner Conroe then opened the floor for discussion.

Commissioner Flannery raised the question about whether the public should associate the recent HAB event with the fact that the Ohio River is listed as one of the most polluted rivers in the country according to a recent news article citing the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI). He also mentioned that he would like to see more public outreach products available to the commissioners that they can use in communicating with stakeholders. Examples would be a white paper on HABs that could help dispel the link from HABs to the traditional industrial pollutants observed in the river as well as the HAB presentations from the Technical Committee meeting that morning. Mr. Harrison mentioned that staff was planning to reach out to state communications personnel to draft a white paper that would include background information for HABs and to summarize state efforts that are planned or already underway to help address HABs. He also stated that ORSANCO's role in communications during this event was to comment broadly on HABs and information and data from the Ohio River, but deferred more specific questions regarding what the states were doing to the appropriate state agencies. In addition, links

to HAB information from each individual state were made available on ORSANCO's website. After additional brief comments by Mr. Harrison, Betsy Mallison (Chair of the Public Interest Advisory Committee), and Commissioners Flannery and Conroe, it was decided that staff would work towards making educational materials, technical resources, and speaking points regarding HABs available on the website when finalized.

Tiffani Kavalec, Proxy for Commissioner Butler, stated that Ohio is working to reorganize their own internal HAB response plan. While they are making progress on ways to make real-time data available, there are still many improvements that could be made within the state to better coordination. Regarding the current Ohio River event, Ms. Kavalec mentioned that there were some miscommunications with ORSANCO resulting in sampling duplication and noted that data collected by Ohio personnel was not distributed with rest of ORSANCO data. She remarked that adding key personnel from Ohio's two district offices that conducted the sampling to any communications group or workgroup would likely help with coordination during future events. After a brief description of ORSANCO's HABs Workgroup by Greg Youngstrom from staff, Mr. Harrison acknowledged that it was a challenge identifying the appropriate personnel from each state to include on the workgroup and provided examples of how this process might be improved.

Commissioner Elmaraghy expressed the need to consider shifting ORSANCO's focus at some point from response to prevention of HABs. Mr. Harrison agreed that this is important and ORSANCO staff will be reaching out to States to compile available information.

Commissioner Fitzgerald raised the question of whether ORSANCO could quantify nutrient loadings from tributaries to identify major sources which would assist with development of any nutrient reduction strategies for the main stem. Mr. Youngstrom replied that our current monitoring design does not allow for calculation of nutrient loadings from tributaries. Staff will investigate this further.

Peter Goodman, Proxy for Commissioner Luallen, pointed out that Ohio River nutrient levels resemble those of 2014 when there was no bloom reported, so it is important to remember that there are many other variables that cause HABs that may be just as important as nutrients. He also expressed his support for the idea of a white paper summarizing ORSANCO's experiences with the 2015 HAB as well as the publication of educational and technical materials on ORSANCO's website. Brief discussion followed regarding the potential usefulness of applications for mobile devices and coordination of volunteers to report future blooms.

Commissioner Duritsa mentioned that, recognizing the recreational impacts and the potential for future blooms, this event should be presented to the media as a victory due to the fact that no drinking water supplies were contaminated. Mr. Harrison recognized the excellent collaboration and cooperation from all entities involved in making sure drinking water was not contaminated.

Commissioner Kupke supported the idea to make the HAB presentations from earlier that morning available on ORSANCO's website and also stressed the need to include commentary from the presenters. He also suggested that a candid review with the agencies within each state regarding the response to the HAB event could also be warranted and informational.

Ms. Kavalec mentioned that the state of Ohio received limited data from ORSANCO during the event and suggested that in the future all data should be geo-referenced and compiled into a single database for visualization and distribution purposes. Mr. Goodman mentioned that Kentucky was currently doing this for all known data from the Ohio River.

Commissioner Elmaraghy questioned what the current plan was to move forward in addressing future Ohio River HABs considering the estimated costs to do so thoroughly could be \$3 million. Mr. Harrison acknowledged that this was a valid question to be discussed in more detail in the near future, most likely in context with other

supplemental funding discussions. He also addressed Ms. Kavalec's concerns regarding geo-referencing the HAB data stating that staff GIS operators were occupied during the event with field activities and suggested exploring some potential collaborations with other entities (e.g., Kentucky and USEPA Region V) to ensure that all future data is geo-referenced.

Commissioner Lovan reinforced the idea to document ORSANCO's response to the HAB event and create a template to improve coordination of any future HAB-related or spill-related events. Ms. Kavalec supported this approach and encouraged ORSANCO to take a leadership role in the response and suggested that though Ohio was prepared to support ORSANCO in the response, clarification in the exact support was needed. Some discussion followed regarding the need for all states to be as consistent as possible regarding recreational advisories.

Scott Mandirola, Proxy for Commissioner Huffman discussed the need to coordinate better within the state, particularly between the Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of Health and Human Resources. He also suggested the need for more collaboration with Ohio on future events. Mr. Mandirola also mentioned that West Virginia crews would be investigating a possible re-occurrence of the bloom in the Ravenswood, WV area next week.

Bruno Pigott, Proxy for Commissioner Comer, reiterated the need for states to improve coordination of HAB events within their respective states, which in turn would better coordination efforts with ORSANCO. Mr. Mandirola added that coordination within each state was difficult given the cross-jurisdictional nature of HABs. Mr. Pigott suggested providing links on ORSANCO's website to existing informational material related to HABs rather than creating new materials to post.

Commissioner Paylor stated that Virginia has not experienced the same level of outbreak as on the Ohio River this year and will benefit from ORSANCO's experiences in dealing with the matter. Mr. Goodman agreed that ORSANCO's experience will benefit Kentucky as well, particularly regarding step-by-step protocols regarding drinking water systems.

Commissioner Lovan addressed the importance of creating a consistent, simple, and standardizing message that could be conveyed to the public about whether or not the water was safe (without distinguishing between drinking or recreational uses).

Ron Schwartz, Proxy for Commissioner Quigley, recommended creating a standardized operating procedure document regarding field sampling that could be shared by all agencies involved in collecting data related to the next incident.

Discussion followed regarding the most appropriate time schedule to follow for communications with partner agencies during the next HAB event. Susan Hedmon, USEPA Region V, mentioned that having a regular communication schedule and supplying a map showing the current state of the event were extremely helpful. She added that ORSANCO's role of coordinating communications among all involved entities was very important and she supported ORSANCO's role as a clearinghouse for data collected related to future events. She also agreed that geo-referencing all future data would be helpful, but noted that the USGS may be better partner than the USEPA regarding the initiative to geo-reference data collected.

Commissioner Conroe then opened the floor to other topics to discuss. Hearing none, the roundtable was adjourned at 2:00 pm.