

Meeting Highlights

MEETING TITLE: INFORMATIONAL MEETING TODAY ON RECENT EMERGENCY SHELLFISHING CLOSURE, ONGOING MONITORING FOR R.I. WATERS

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT: PROVIDENCE – The Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM), in partnership with the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), will hold an informational meeting tomorrow to review the recent emergency shellfishing closure for Rhode Island waters and plans for continued monitoring.

On Saturday, October 15, the precautionary shellfish harvesting closure for Narragansett Bay, Mt. Hope Bay, Kickemuit River, Sakonnet River and their tributaries was lifted. The week-long emergency closure was due to a confirmed harmful algae bloom caused by the presence of toxic phytoplankton, *Pseudo-nitzschia* spp. During the emergency closure, DEM and RIDOH analyzed water and shellfish samples for the presence of the toxin, domoic acid. All shellfish samples collected throughout the Bay tested negative, allowing the waters to be reopened. At tomorrow's meeting, DEM and RIDOH will review the actions taken during the closure as well as their plans for continued monitoring of impacted waters.

DETAILS: Tuesday, October 18, 2016 | 5:00 p.m. Corliss Auditorium, University of Rhode Island, Graduate School of Oceanography

MEETING HIGHLIGHTS DRAFTED BY: Azure Cygler, Coastal Resources Center & Rhode Island Sea Grant, GSO/URI

These highlights, the presentation by RI DEM, and an audio recording of the meeting are available at <http://www.rismp.org/news/>

Into and welcome by Janet Coit, RI DEM Director

Presentations by David Borkman (RI DEM) and Angelo Liberti (RI DEM)

Please see the presentation/audio for more details

Important points:

- RI DEM has an establish routine monitoring program already, year round, 2-3 times per week for bacteria and phytoplankton samples, including a 3-step detection approach for harmful algal blooms (HAB) species.
- Rhode Island has the species present in our waters that causes amnesic shellfish poisoning (ASP) all year round, it is just that these have always been in such low numbers they haven't posed a public health risk before.

- There is a lot science and managers around the country do not understand about the different toxin-producing species in question, especially the phytoplankton Pseudo-nitzschia spp. For example, they have the ability to turn their toxins on and off but researchers are unsure as to when/how/why they do this.
- The recent bloom event started on Oct.6th with a shellfish closure and a hold on dealer stocks of shellfish. With 2x/week intensive sampling and coordination with Department of Health (Health) and labs in Maine and Canada, including meat sample analysis, dealer stock was released on Oct.11th. Further sampling and communication allowed RI DEM to reopen waters in Narragansett Bay on Oct.15 and they are continuing to do monitoring.
- RI DEM and Health had an in-depth consultation with the Gulf of Maine team that have more expertise on these blooms and they recommended 2 times per week sampling of plankton and toxicity screening throughout the Bay and to adjust/remove the concept of a “threshold” for cells counts of the harmful species as these have proved to be unreliable, given the lack of knowledge about these organisms.

Future thinking and considerations:

- RIDEM would like to plan for the future IF another even occurs to better tap into the out-pouring of help offered from industry (wild harvest and aquaculture) as well as groups like Save the Bay to bolster monitoring and utilize a broader support base.
- RI DEM and Health may need to re-think the tagging area concept and possibly consider subdividing the larger areas especially in order to manage recalls more effectively.
- RI DEM and Health worked very hard (long hours and weekends, above and beyond) to communicate the information with the industry and public in very near real-time. They encourage people to sign up for the RI DEM listserv to be more informed in the future.
- There is a need for a state-wide protocol for the future in dealing with these types of blooms. No one knows why it happened or if it will happen again, but the state can tap into experts from Canada and the northeast states to be even more thoroughly prepared for the future (i.e. having enough toxicity kits on hand, etc.).
- RI DEM might consider setting mussel bags out for testing and routine monitoring in the future – Mussels accumulate toxins the quickest.

Comments from the audience:

- Much praise and appreciation from industry towards RI DEM and Health on being responsive and communicative in this tough time – Also getting people back to work and keeping the public safe!
- Problematic that there are only two FDA-approved domoic acid testing labs in the U.S. (Maine and Washington D.C) – So despite RWU and others offering to help with testing, RI DEM and Health are confined to using these labs which makes for a time lag.
- With the MANY unknowns around this bloom and the organism that caused it, there is much need for research on the subject (urging from Health).