

Region 4 White Paper Peer Review – Announcement

A peer review process of the EPA Region 4 White Paper, “*Evaluation of the Role of Nitrogen and Phosphorus in Causing or Contributing to Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf, August 2004*” requested by the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force is currently underway.

The peer review is part of an assessment of progress called for under the “*2001 Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico*,” in achieving the three goals (*Coastal, Within Basin, and Quality of Life*) of the Action Plan and decisions on a future course of action. The peer review will independently assess the scientific validity of the conclusions on the roles of phosphorus and nitrogen limiting nutrients during algal bloom development given the data reviewed.

Background

Under the “*2001 Action Plan for Reducing, Mitigating, and Controlling Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico*,” the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Taskforce calls for an assessment of progress in achieving the three goals (*Coastal, Within Basin, and Quality of Life*) of the Action Plan and decisions on a future course of action:

By December 2005 and every five years thereafter, the Task Force will assess the nutrient load reductions achieved and the response of the hypoxic zone, water quality throughout the Basin, and economic and social effects. Based on this assessment, the Task Force will determine appropriate actions to continue to implement this strategy or, if necessary, revise the strategy.

The first step of this assessment, now in its beginning stages, is a peer review of the EPA Region 4 White Paper, “*Evaluation of the Role of Nitrogen and Phosphorus in Causing or Contributing to Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf, August 2004*” requested by the Task Force. The peer review will independently assess the scientific validity of the conclusions on the roles of phosphorus and nitrogen limiting nutrients during algal bloom development presented in the White Paper and supplemental information. Supplemental information includes the widely circulated earlier versions (January and April) of the White Paper, data used to develop the White Paper, and a summary of the methods used for data analysis.

Using the process employed by EPA to seek expert panel reviews of internal scientific and policy papers, the peer review process will proceed as follows:

- A peer review charge with approved parameters has been put forth by the Task Force;
- A pool of nationally recognized scientists were recommended by the Task Force;
- The contractor (Versar) will select nine reviewers in each of three areas of specialization from the recommended scientists and conduct a standard conflict of interest review on each of the nominated scientists;
- The reviewers will have 30 days to conduct the review;

- The contractor will produce a summary of comments and will deliver complete copies of the original comments within two weeks of the conclusion of the review;
- Materials to be reviewed will be posted on the web, and public comment will be solicited while the peer review is conducted;
- Peer review comments will be reviewed and EPA will decide if revisions and final publication of the Region 4 White Paper is necessary;
- Peer review comments the comment summary, a summary of public comments, and responses to those comments as deemed necessary, will be posted on the web once the review is completed;
- Peer review comments will not be attributed to individual reviewers;
- Names of peer reviewers will be made public when the comments are released.