

Communicating the Risks of PFAS and HABs: State Case Studies and Toolkits Annual Accomplishments Report Update

Background: Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and harmful algal blooms (HABs) are priority environmental issues for states. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and US EPA have been supporting state and public water systems in their efforts to reduce exposure to PFAS in drinking water, and exposure to HABs—particularly cyanotoxins—in recreational and drinking waters. Proper risk communication is needed to inform the public of PFAS- and HABs-related issues without causing panic. Materials need to be developed by taking into account the different audiences' needs and their preferred modes of communication. There is also the balance of communicating what different health departments, environmental agencies, and water systems can and cannot do to address the issues.

US EPA worked with the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) on a recent MOA project to highlight state-level risk communication of PFAS and HABs.

In early 2018, ASTHO and ECOS interviewed health and environmental agency staff from 13 states about their risk communication strategies and lessons learned for either PFAS contamination or HABs. ASTHO and ECOS collected information on how selected states' health and environmental agencies have been addressing PFAS and HABs, including the wording of accompanying risk communication/health advisories and the methods used to communicate them to the public. ECOS and ASTHO compiled the findings to share with other states who are looking to update or create new advisories and supporting risk communication materials for their own jurisdictions. ASTHO and ECOS hosted two webinars showcasing at least three state examples of PFAS (June 14, 2018) and HABs (June 21, 2018) risk communication strategies, providing key findings from the case studies and offering potential considerations to others seeking to implement or improve their risk communication practices.

Results were compiled into brief case studies that outline the states' overall efforts, risk communication efforts, relevant resources, key messages for the public, and challenges in the states' programs or communications.

- ECOS states for PFAS state case studies (PA, MI and NH); ASTHO states (CO, MN and NY)
- ECOS states for HABs state case studies (MO, NC, OH and UT); ASTHO states (IN, OR and VT)

Outputs:

- ECOS developed 7 (3 PFAS / 4 HABs) state case study fact sheets; ASTHO developed 6 (3 PFAS / 3 HABs) state case study fact sheets (13 total)
- Two webinars showcasing PFAS and HABs state case studies and risk communication strategies
- Identified existing risk communication toolkits and resources

Outcomes:

- Improved public health due to a greater awareness of PFAS and HABs risks
- Public health and environmental partnerships with states and their communities
- Increased understanding of state practices and experiences regarding PFAS and cyanotoxin risk communication strategies

Case studies and links to the webinar recordings (available upon request) are found here:

<http://www.astho.org/Programs/Environmental-Health/Water-Safety//#RiskComWaterCont>

<https://www.ecos.org/documents/state-level-risk-communication-of-pfas-and-habs/>