

EXTENSION EFFORTS OF THE TREASURE COAST HAB WORKING GROUP

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Harmful algal blooms (HABs), particularly cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae, blooms have been a chief environmental concern among communities along the Treasure Coast (Martin, St. Lucie, Okeechobee and Indian River counties). In recognition of this issue and to better address stakeholder concerns related to HABs, UF IFAS extension agents and specialists representing Treasure Coast counties formed a HAB working group in 2019. The objectives of the working group are to 1) utilize the best available scientific knowledge on HABs to educate the public and address potential misinformation on HABs, 2) establish lines of communication and support among Treasure Coast IFAS faculty on HAB issues to jointly address stakeholder concerns, 3) support research and extension programs that address HABs and their impacts, and 4) engage and potentially partner with other agencies and organizations involved in HAB issues. Guided by these objectives, and in response to specific impacts caused by cyanobacterial blooms along the Treasure Coast, extension products and programs were produced and developed. To address cyanotoxin poisoning of dogs in 2018, we produced a fact sheet for the general public on cyanobacteria and dog safety, with planned conversion to an infographic document. Review of this fact sheet was not only shared internally, but also with local veterinarians. We also collaborated with the Martin County Department of Health to translate blue-green algae advisory signs to Spanish. We also expanded a citizen science program on algae monitoring, continuing an earlier (2017) program developed by several working group members. This regional program will be united with a national citizen science program (NOAA Phytoplankton Monitoring Network) to provide local data to a national network. These initial efforts provide examples of how this working group has addressed regional HAB issues and developed a framework for ongoing collaboration.

PRESENTER BIO: Vincent Encomio is the Florida Sea Grant extension agent for Martin and St. Lucie counties. His extension programming addresses issues related to coastal health and water quality. He has worked extensively on oyster and living shoreline restoration projects and coordinates citizen science programs on water quality and microplastics.