

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Andy Harris (R-MD), Chairman

Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment

Harmful Algal Blooms: Action Plans for Scientific Solutions

June 1, 2011

Harmful algal blooms, or HABs, and hypoxia, are issues that this committee is very familiar with, as this is the third hearing on this topic in three years. HABs are an abundance of freshwater or marine algae that can produce toxins or are produced in large enough numbers to harm the surrounding environment. Virtually every State has been affected by HABs, making this a national problem. However, the different types of algae, the causes of their explosive growth, and the effect they have on the ecosystem varies so greatly that there is no single, national solution to deal with HABs.

While this is an important environmental issue, HABs and hypoxia can also have a direct detrimental effect on human society. The bodies of water that are affected by HABs are the same as the ones we use for drinking water, for recreational purposes, and as the source of livelihoods such as commercial fishing.

Like all Marylanders, my family and I cherish a clean and healthy Chesapeake Bay. We are privileged to live so close to this remarkable resource and share a commitment to caring for it and its wildlife.

Harmful algal blooms cause oxygen depleted dead zones that can kill fish and other marine life in the Bay. The collaborative efforts reauthorized in legislation I will introduce help harness the ingenuity and resources available from the private sector, academia, local governments and non-profits, as well as the federal government.

In today's hearing, we will be discussing not only the current state of research in HABs and hypoxia, we will be discussing draft legislation to reauthorize the Harmful Algal Bloom and Hypoxia Research and Control Act. This statute was first authorized in 1998 and again in 2004. As of the current fiscal year, the programs authorized under this law have now expired. The reports required under the law have provided us a great deal of information on the research needed to not only try to prevent HABs and hypoxia, but to control, mitigate, predict, and respond to these events. Although there is a great need for it, the technology to address HABs and hypoxia does not seem to be advancing as quickly as the rest of the research areas.

In a utopian world, we would prevent these incidents from occurring entirely. However, in the world we do live in, some of these events are naturally occurring and therefore could not be prevented, and other events are exacerbated by human activities. We need to make sure that the research in prevention does not hinder or eclipse the parallel research path of control and mitigation through technology solutions.

Given the importance of these issues to human health, economic prosperity and the environment, I think it is important for us to ensure that these research programs continue and work on providing multiple ways of addressing HABs and hypoxia in the future. The legislation I have asked all our witnesses to comment on is in draft form in order to provide structure for our discussion today. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on their thoughts on how we might improve the language and I look forward to working with the minority as we move along this process.