Coastal Hazards Risk Communication: A Technical Assistance Transfer Project within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System

Project Location

East Coast
Gulf Coast

Project Duration

June 2017 to May 2019

Project Lead

Lisa Auermuller
Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve
auermull@marine.rutgers.edu

Project Type

Science Transfer – Promoting the use of science

Products

- Training process agendas for Chesapeake Bay – Maryland, Delaware, Narragansett Bay, and Weeks Bay Reserves
- Risk communication strategizing tool

Project Partners

- Chesapeake Bay – Maryland National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Delaware National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve
- Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
- National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
- NOAA Office for Coastal Management
- Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

Project Webpage

nerrssciencecollaborative.org/project/Auermuller17

Overview

Risk communication skills are essential for coastal community leaders in order to effectively engage, educate, and trigger behavioral changes that improve resilience to coastal hazards. In the wake of Superstorm Sandy, the Jacques Cousteau National Estuarine Research Reserve and NOAA's Office for Coastal Management recognized that coastal decision makers needed effective risk communication skills and strategies to successfully implement community resilience planning. They developed a one-day risk communication training to meet this need.

This project transferred that approach to build risk communication capacity in four coastal communities. Staff from four National Estuarine Research Reserves and area partners participated in a two-day event that included the Office for Coastal Management's general risk communication training, as well as a technical assistance workshop specific to the needs of each local decision-making community. Coastal outreach personnel gained skills and insights to inform their resilience work and developed ideas for specific local projects involving risk communication.

Project Approach

This project paired a one-day training on risk communication with a one-day technical assistance workshop to build the capacity of the National Estuarine Research Reserves and their area partners to communicate risk effectively. The training and workshop took place at four National Estuarine Research Reserves. On the first day, Office for Coastal Management staff delivered their training on risk communication for reserve staff, area coastal decision-making partners, educators, and other extension personnel. On the second day, each of the participating reserves hosted hands-on technical assistance training for reserve staff and area partners. The technical assistance training addressed site and project-specific challenges faced in communicating risk, helped identify and strategize ways of creating desired behavioral changes for target audiences, and mapped out next steps. The National Estuarine Research Reserve Association worked with each of the reserves following their technical assistance workshop to share information about the topics covered, audiences, and participants at the training through social media, newsletter articles, or press releases.

Benefits

- Coastal outreach personnel and decision makers increased their capacity to communicate risk and developed strategies to apply this knowledge through hands-on, site-specific applications.
- The National Estuarine Research Reserve System and NOAA Office of Coastal Management saw improved understanding of risk communication opportunities and diversity faced by various geographies and communities.
- The project catalyzed expansion of a community of practice around the reserve system for risk communication knowledge and future transfer.

What's Next

- The four participating reserves have begun to map and execute communication-centered next steps.
- This project represents the start of a risk communication community of practice across the reserve system that may expand through future knowledge sharing and technical assistance opportunities.

About the Science Collaborative

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System's Science Collaborative supports collaborative research that addresses coastal management problems important to the reserves. The Science Collaborative is managed by the University of Michigan's Water Center through a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Funding for the research reserves and this program comes from NOAA. Learn more at nerrssciencecollaborative.org or coast.noaa.gov/nerrs.