Saying more with less

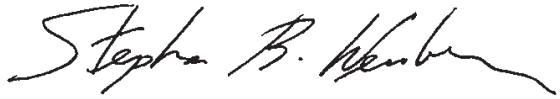
One of SCCWRP's strengths is a history of sharing our findings with other scientists. We routinely make presentations at scientific meetings, organize conferences, and publish articles in scientific journals. This year's Annual Report contains 29 research articles, the highest annual output in the organization's 42-year history, and for the first time we have added web links to supplementary information for those readers who want even more detail. The report also contains a list of the many external advisory committees on which our staff serve, another mechanism by which we connect with fellow scientists.

However, SCCWRP was created to provide a linkage between science and water quality management, a goal which is not fully met by this Annual Report or other communication mechanisms typically used by the scientific community. Managers depend on us to find other mechanisms to translate complex processes into easily understood scientific principles. Our research carries much less importance if the findings are not clear and applicable to real-world environmental management issues.

With this goal in mind, SCCWRP has embarked this year on several new efforts to communicate in new ways. One of these is a series of two-minute videos, which can be found on our web site, where our scientists describe different research areas and their potential management implications. The second is preparation of two-page fact sheets on emerging scientific issues. The fact sheets condense our current scientific knowledge into a short summary organized to inform upper level managers who are interested in the topic, but have little scientific background.

Developing products that summarize complex information into these shorter products is among the most difficult parts of SCCWRP's communication mission. Our society routinely shares information in 140 characters (the length of a tweet), which can be inconsistent with robust scientific communication. No laboratory experiment, field survey, or technical finding is without some level of scientific uncertainty and one of our challenges is to provide clear explanations of what is known, while being careful not to make judgments or oversimplify concepts to the point of disregarding uncertainty. Twenty-page research articles contain discussion sections that allow us to expound on the many factors contributing to uncertainty. Two-page fact sheets, on the other hand, require us to provide simple answers without long explanations, justifications, or caveats.

The first of these fact sheets, which can be found at the end of this Annual Report, describes our progress in developing new rapid microbiological monitoring methods that for the first time allow same-day beach health warnings. It will be followed by a fact sheet on a new topic each quarter. We hope you find them useful and look forward to your feedback as to whether we have found the right balance in providing easily understood information without overstating the limits of scientific knowledge.



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Executive Director