

REPORT ON ENVIROCAST ENVIRONMENTAL STORIES RELATING TO THE  
GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY

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## Executive Summary

In 2008, the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) partnered with the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and StormCenter Communications, Inc. to provide broad based communication of environmental stories with a focus on water quality through a Clean Water Act Section 319 matching grant. The goal of this partnership, known as Envirocast, was to reach a large audience through both on-air broadcasts and the Envirocast Web Site. This was accomplished through a partnership with local Houston television station KPRC, Channel 2 and its Going Green program. The news stories were done in conjunction with Channel 2's weather casts and the web site was integrated into KPRC's Going Green endeavor.

In the early stages, H-GAC assembled a Local Content Provider Network (LCPN) comprised of public and private sector environmentally oriented organizations and agencies involved in specific actions and/or public outreach and education to improve the quality of our environment. The LCPN identified and developed stories for Envirocast. A steering committee was formed to discuss and resolve any issues that might arise during the lifetime of Envirocast. In addition to the Local Content Providers, KPRC also developed a number of stories per week for broadcast.

There were challenges to getting Envirocast started including the intrusion of Hurricane Ike and the Presidential Election. These challenges were met and as of June 2009 at least one hundred fifteen (115) stories have been developed by the Local Content Provider Network and 90 stories were aired by KPRC.

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) joined the Envirocast Partnership to focus attention on important environmental issues relating to the Galveston Bay Estuary. The resources provided by GBEP resulted in five (5) news stories and twelve (12) web stories about or relating to the Galveston Bay Estuary. In addition, two interviews on KPRC Saturday's Morning Show reached 27, 204 households in the region. The titles and dates of these stories can be found in the Project Results section and in the Archives of the Web Site <http://kprc.envirocast.net>.

## Introduction

The Houston-Galveston Area Council is the region-wide voluntary association of local governments in the 13-county Gulf Coast Planning region of Texas. Its service area is 12,500 square miles and contains more than 5.7 million people. H-GAC's mission is to serve as the instrument of local government cooperation, promoting the region's orderly development and the safety and welfare of its citizens and serves as the Governor-appointed agency for water quality planning.

H-GAC was approached by the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board to develop a broad-based communications project that would reach a large portion of the Gulf Coast Planning Region with information that could provide the basis for changes in attitude and behavior for the purpose of reducing nonpoint source pollution and create more of an awareness of actions that would improve the health of the region's environment.

The H-GAC region is experiencing some of the fastest growth in Texas and forecasts show that over three million people will be moving to the region by the year 2035. The rising population makes it more difficult to manage water resources and puts pressure on solid waste management and ensuring that the quality of air will pose no health problems as associated business, industry and additional automobile traffic increases with the population growth.

Nonpoint sources of pollution contribute to an accumulation of trash and debris from littering and illegal dumping; pesticides fertilizers, and animal waste from lawns and agricultural practices; and sedimentation and turbidity from soil and bank erosion and construction activities, plus the transport of other pollutants with sediment. Many nonpoint sources of pollution can be greatly reduced through the actions of local governments, individual citizens or groups of stakeholders and these are a focus of Envirocast.

A better-informed population becomes a better steward of our water, land and air resources and Envirocast supports ongoing public outreach programs of H-GAC, local governments, citizen groups, and state and federal agencies targeted at improving the quality of our environment. The Envirocast project uses extensive media outreach as a way to get valuable information out to a larger audience than is now possible.

## METHODOLOGY

Envirocast® is an environmental wire service, providing innovative environmental content and technologies to the media in order to raise the environmental IQ of America. Using industry experience, communications, and science applications expertise, the service gathers and interprets environmental earth science content for distribution to media outlets and to the public through a coordinated set of media platforms. Envirocast® services add value by putting the content into a form and format that is immediately ready for use on-air, on-line and in-print. This content takes issues that are locally relevant and generated and applies sound scientific principles to engage the audience and to act as an agent of change. The focus is to present innovative environmental content in a way that gets the general public interested in how environmental content benefits them and leads them to enhance their environmental stewardship.

H-GAC structured a Local Content Provider Network (LCPN) for harvesting stories that H-GAC submitted to StormCenter, Inc. StormCenter provided the connection to KPRC Channel 2 to get stories on-air provided web site management for environmental information and posted videos from the stories and interviews developed by KPRC.

The current LCPN consists of 124 representatives including local elected officials, representatives of local, state and federal agencies as well as environmental and educational organizations. The LCPN is notified and updated monthly on stories that have been submitted and provided with necessary templates for developing stories. In addition, organizations are contacted at environmental events and encouraged to develop and submit stories.

A nine member steering committee was convened to discuss broad topic ideas and address any issues that might arise. Membership includes representatives of Houston, Harris County Stormwater Quality, Harris County Flood Control District, Galveston Bay Estuary Program, Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, Waste Management Inc., Galveston Bay Foundation, Bayou Preservation Association, Citizens Environmental Coalition, and H-GAC.

Content providers use a template that was designed by StormCenter and agreed to by KPRC Channel 2. Environmental events, ideas for stories and interviews are submitted to StormCenter with a copy to H-GAC. StormCenter directs the stories/events to KPRC Channel 2 for broadcast consideration and StormCenter places them on the Envirocast Web Site (<http://kprc.envirocast.net/>).

## PROJECT RESULTS

Aside from the number of stories submitted, successfully incorporated into KPRC newscasts, and/or placed on the Going Green/Envirocast Web Site, this project has:

- Increased households' exposure to environmental issues affecting the Galveston Bay Estuary as well as the H-GAC Upper Gulf Coast Planning Region;
- Helped create a conduit through which many more people can be educated on the value of Galveston Bay and the benefits derived from this important estuary;
- Stirred up the interest of local KPRC Channel 2 reporters in reporting environmental stories; and
- Demonstrated that there are many opportunities to participate in environmental events that can benefit the Galveston Bay Estuary.

Six stories appeared on KPRC newscasts related to Galveston Bay: "Pilot Project Leads to Cleaner Bayous" (7/25/08) "Hip to Habitat, Part 1 (12/2/08); "Environmental Groups Warn Against Dumping TV Sets (12/9/08); "Trash Bash Cleans Up Waterways" (3/28/09); "Hip to Habitat, Part 2 (5/15/09); San Jacinto River Cleanup Expected Soon (4/13/09);

Four interviews were conducted by KPRC on the Saturday Morning show: 'Galveston Bay Issues (2/27/09) with Helen Drummond, GBEP and Lisa Gonzalez, Houston Advanced Research Center; Trash Bash (3/28/09) with Dan Raab, Trash Bash Steering Committee; and 'Armand Bayou Watershed Festival' (4/25/09) with Kristi Tompkins, H-GAC.

Eleven stories appeared on the Going Green/Envirocast Web Site: "North Deer Island Protection Project Receives Gulf Guardian Award" (10/22/08); "Preserving a Coastal Treasure" (10/23/08); "Biologists Assess Ike Impacts to Coastal Ecosystems" (10/23/08); "Ike Impact on coastal Fisheries Mixed, But Overall May be Beneficial" (10/23/08); "After Ike Texas Struggle to Start Over" (10/23/08); "Local Shoreline Restoration Project Garners Two National Awards" (11/3/08); "Get Hip to Habitat" (11/17/08); "Abandoned Crab Traps Drop-Off Sites Announced" (2/17/09); "West Galveston Island Sand Dune Restoration Event" (4/29/09); "First Inaugural Houston Independent School District Tournament for Archery & Bass Fishing" (5/13/09); "Recovery Act Funding for 50 Coastal Restoration Projects" (6/30/09).

The major lessons learned have to do with expectations;

- A local television's range of travel is relatively limited due to equipment and time constraints and if a story or event occurs fifty miles away, it likely will not get an on the scene reporter. However if it is close enough, like the Mason Park constructed wetlands project, it will get broadcast.
- Although willing to participate in submitting relevant and, interesting environmental stories organizations and individuals have many demands on their time and resources making it necessary to be aggressive in keeping the effort in the forefront.

- There are many environmental stories to be told, some not as attention getting as others. Tie them to youth and education and they are more likely to be seen on television.
- For an environmental message to get across to people, to have them learn that it is important to protect our natural resources, it must be a consistent message and illustrates the need to search for continued funding from public and private interests for the Envirocast program to succeed.