

2019-2020 Humanities Center Brown Bag Series

Water and Health Infrastructure, Resilience, and Learning (WHIRL): Boil Water Advisories as Risk Communication

Drinking water and public health depend on each other. In many places it is difficult to avoid and fix big problems related to water quality when they happen. The NSF-funded WHIRL project will assess threats to safe water quality and what happens when people's access to clean water is disrupted. To do this, we need to better understand the connections between drinking water and public health. We will present an overview of the WHIRL project as well as results from an analysis of boil water advisories (BWA) which we argue are a form of risk communication.

When water systems experience (potential) contamination, risk communication is utilized to advise publics to boil water before consumption and use. This study sought to understand how local news media in the U.S. incorporate the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC; 2016) guidelines when reporting on BWAs. A content analysis of $n = 1041$ local news media articles did not consistently incorporate CDC (2016) guidelines when reporting BWAs. As local news media are primary informational sources for publics, there are serious implications related to news media's reporting of BWAs, resiliency, and the importance of local level partnerships.

Richard Smith

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Department of Communication

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Tuesday, February 11, 2020

12:30PM—1:30PM

Rm. 2339

Faculty Administration Building



Dr. Smith is an Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Wayne State University. He will focus on quantifying the social and economic impacts of the two critical forms of infrastructure on communities.

Dr. McElmurry is an Associate Professor in the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering at Wayne State University. He has experience leading multidisciplinary teams focused on integrating water and health. He will lead the chemical characterization of water quality.

Sydney O'Shay-Wallace is a Ph.D. Candidate and Thomas C. Rumble Fellow in the Department of Communication. She is also a pre-doctoral fellow with the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute for Child and Family Development. The primary research problems she addresses center around issues related to health and risk communication in vulnerable and stigmatized populations.

Khairul Islam is a Ph.D. student and graduate research assistant in the Department of Communication. His research interests are in the areas of risk and crisis with public health implications. Presently, he is involved with the NSF-funded Project titled Water and Health Infrastructure, Resilience, and Learning (WHIRL) that examines risks, hazards, and disruptions in the water system to promote reliability and resilience. Khairul's current research projects also include assessing media coverage of dengue outbreaks in South Asia, with a particular focus in Bangladesh.

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