



Citizens Guide to Advocacy: *Florida Harmful Algal Bloom Crisis*

Floridians are facing a crisis as harmful algal blooms, including a significant red tide bloom in southwest Florida, are impacting our ocean and coasts, killing iconic marine wildlife and impairing beaches. These events are endangering the Floridian way of life, one that depends on a vibrant, healthy ocean to sustain coastal communities and draw thousands of people to our beautiful beaches. We [wrote a blog](#) that provides additional background on the harmful algal bloom crisis.

Floridians stand together when it matters, and a healthy ocean matters to us all. We can and must turn this tide.

Now is the time to tell your policy-makers about the harmful algal bloom crisis from your perspective and how they can help. Follow these steps to raise your voice:

Share your story

The harmful algal bloom crisis is impacting Floridians in many ways. Your story can be a powerful message. Make this about you, your family and/or your community. Take some time to think about your story. Some questions to ask yourself:

- Why is this issue important to you?
- What impacts have the algal blooms had on you, your family or your community?
- If you are a business owner, has this impacted your business at all, financially or otherwise?
- What do clean, healthy waterways mean to you? Why is it important?

A. Submit your photos and stories

Ocean Conservancy is [collecting photos and stories](#) from Floridians who have been impacted by the harmful algal bloom crisis across the state. By joining in this photo campaign, you can bring a voice and an image to the crisis unfolding. We will work share photos with elected officials, with names, photo credit, and any associated story or comments attached as applicable.

B. Share your story on social media

Share your perspective on the harmful algal bloom crisis in your community on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. Include photos with your posts. Social media is increasingly an effective way to raise awareness, frame an issue, influence decision-makers, create a sense of community, promote events and celebrate successes. Make sure to tag your elected officials so they see your posts. Consider joining the conversation: #RedTide #AlgalBloom

C. Reach out to your local media and/or write a letter to the editor (LTE)

Consider writing and sending a letter to the editor to your local newspaper. The newspaper's website will have information on the word limits for letters and anything else you should know. You can typically find this information under the "Opinions" page. A helpful guide to writing an LTE can be [found here](#).



Demand action

Your legislator needs to know this issue is impacting you. Let them know you want to see credible, long-term action taken to address the harmful algal bloom crisis. Ask them what their record is, and what they are doing now to address long-term solutions that will improve Florida's ocean and coastal health and economy.

Helpful links to find your legislators are provided at the end of this toolkit.

A. Call your lawmakers

Let your legislators know the impact harmful algal blooms are having on your community, and urge them to take action. Share your personal story, ask them what actions they have taken in the past, are taking now, and what they plan to do in the future. Make sure to follow up with them.

B. Meet with lawmakers

In-person meetings are one of the most effective ways to influence your elected official. Face-to-face meetings put your issue front and center as something people care about.

- Scheduling and preparing for a meeting:
 - Locate the office that is closest to you
 - Contact the legislator's scheduler (this is usually the person that answers the phone)
 - Once your meeting is on their calendar, call the day prior to the meeting to confirm
 - Bring materials with you, such as visual aids, photos, print-outs, spreadsheets, information packets.

C. Attend public forums and town hall meetings

Often, your elected officials will host and attend in-district events and town halls. If there is one near you, you should plan to attend and share your story.

- Things to consider:
 - **Bring photos with you:** Photos can explain how this harmful algal bloom crisis is impacting you and your community.
 - **Get videos and photos:** Take pictures or video of the event before, during, or after. After the meeting, share your pictures through social media. Tag your representative, and perhaps even your hometown paper, radio or TV station.
 - **Follow up:** Get contact information to follow-up with staff after the event to continue your conversation.

Follow up

After you've taken one or more actions above, continue to follow up. Keep in touch with elected officials and their staff, continue to share updates and information on social media and gather friends to attend public forums. By keeping this conversation going, you can help keep the harmful algal bloom crisis in Florida at the forefront of conversation in the state, and nationally.



HELPFUL RESOURCES

Additional information to help you understand the harmful algal bloom crisis, contact your elected officials and reach out to state agencies to report impacts to your community.

- **Background on blue-green algae and red tide:** There are multiple events occurring across Florida right now, in freshwater and the marine environment. Read up on the differences between the events, and how they impact the environment and public health.
 - [Ocean Conservancy blog](#)
 - [Blue-green algae](#)
 - [Red tide](#)
- **Who are your elected officials:** We've provided some information below to help you reach out:
 - **Federal officials:**
 - Senate – [Bill Nelson](#) and [Marco Rubio](#)
 - House – Representatives can be [found here](#)
 - **State officials:**
 - Governor – [Rick Scott](#)
 - State Senate - state senators can be [found here](#)
 - State House – state representatives can be [found here](#)
 - **Local officials:**
 - Mayors and city councilors can be found by searching your local county government websites.
- **Florida DEP harmful algal bloom monitoring and response program (blue-green algae only):** <https://floridadep.gov/dear/algal-bloom>
- **Florida FWC red tide status:** Useful information to understand where red tide is being reported and its concentrations, respiratory impacts and more. <http://myfwc.com/redtidestatus>
- **Report impacts**
 - **Report blue-green algae blooms:** <http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/3444948/Algal-Bloom-Reporting-Form>
 - **Report fish kills:** <https://public.myfwc.com/FWRI/FishKillReport/Submit.aspx>
 - **Report wildlife impacts:** To report a dead or injured sea turtle or marine mammal (such as a manatee or dolphin), call 1-888-404-FWCC
 - **Report impacts to human health:** Contact the Florida Poison Control Center at 1-800-222-1222, or learn more <http://www.floridahealth.gov/Environmental-Health/Aquatic-Toxins/>
- **Volunteer for FWC's Red Tide Offshore Monitoring Program:** <http://myfwc.com/research/redtide/monitoring/current/offshore-monitoring/>

