



FINDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM AN ANALYSIS OF FISH CONTAMINATION ISSUES COVERAGE IN THE WRITTEN MEDIA

A Record Analysis

Wednesday, September 30, 2015
Stockton



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN
DELTA CONSERVANCY
A California State Agency





Outline

- Why are we interested in the media coverage
- How we did the analysis
- What we found out
- What does that mean
- How can we use this



Media - Why Does It Matter

“If you don’t exist in the media, for all practical purposes, you don’t exist”.

Daniel Schorr, News Correspondent



Media and Public Agenda

- Very connected - what's on people's minds reflects what's in the media
- “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads”
- Mass communication theories - agenda setting theory and framing theory
- Large body of evidence showing that the media influence how the public, policy makers and the media themselves rank the importance of different issues.

“The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about”.

Bernard Cohen, Political Scientist



Connection to Public Health

Shift in interventions from

Individual-level strategies that tackle individual risk-taking through **education and information dissemination**

to

Structural interventions that presume a certain degree of social causation of public health problems and attempt to change **product-content** or **social, economic, political, or physical environments** that shape and constrain health behaviors.

Change from ...

Give people a **message** about their **personal health**.

To

Give communities a **voice** to define and act on **public health issues**.

So that this...



Sources: USAToday, The Telegraph

Can be expanded into this



Source: The Augusta Chronicle

So that this can happen

- Concord, MA bans both “fast food restaurants” and “drive-in” service.
- Carlsbad , CA bans all new drive-through restaurants.
- Detroit bans carry-out, fast-food and drive-in restaurants within 500 feet of elementary, junior and senior high schools.
- Arden Hills, MN bans fast food restaurants within 400 feet of schools, churches, public recreation areas and residentially-zoned lots.
- Elmsford, NY mandates at least 2,000 feet between fast food restaurants

The Spectrum of Prevention

Influencing Policy and Legislation

Developing strategies to change laws and policies

Changing organizational practices

Adopting legislation and changing norms

Fostering coalitions and networks

Convening groups and individuals for greater impact

Educating providers

Informing providers who influence others

Promoting Community Education

Reaching groups with information and resources

Strengthening individual knowledge and skills

Enhancing individual capacity

Media Record Analysis and Public Health

- Process and outcome evaluation measure
- Employed to create targeted support for the adoption of a policy or an intervention that promotes structural change
- Used to understand whether and how a public health issue is reported in the news sources that are relevant to the audience in question



Analysis - Elements

- Coverage of the issue
- Coverage of related issues
- Main themes and arguments
- Who is reporting
- Who are the spokespeople
- What solutions are being presented
- Who is named as being responsible for the problem
- Who can solve the problem
- What facts/perspectives/stories can help improve the case
- What's missing

Methods

➤ News articles from local newspapers

➤ Delta Counties

Contra Costa, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Solano, and Yolo

➤ Timeframe

- **Start: June 2013** – release of the results of the River and Stream Survey (May 2013) was funded by the State Water Resources Control Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)
- **End: July 2015** – Start date for the construction of salinity barriers in the Delta

Methods

➤ Online news databases

- LexisNexis
- Factiva
- Access World News (NewsBank)

➤ Keywords: Fish, advisory, toxins, fish contamination, mercury, PCBs, chemicals in fish, Sacramento Delta, San Joaquin Delta, Sacramento River.

Why written media

The Topics for Which Newspapers are the Top Source

1 Percent of adults who rely on newspapers for these topics ...		2 Next most preferred source for each topic...		3 Other important source for this topic
		On some topics newspapers tie for the lead with...		
Crime	36%		TV news 29%	Internet 12%
Local politics	26%	TV news 28%	Internet 17%	Word of mouth 7%
Community events	25%		Word of mouth 13%	Internet 12%
Arts events	25%		Internet 17%	TV news 13%
Local taxes	22%		TV news 9%	Internet 9%
Schools	21%	Internet 18%	TV news 10%	Word of mouth 10%
Housing	19%	Internet 17%	Word of mouth 4%	TV news 3%
Government activities	19%		TV news 12%	Internet 6%
Local jobs	17%	Internet 16%	Word of mouth 3%	TV news 3%
Zoning & development	17%		TV news 6%	Internet 4%
Social services	13%		TV news 8%	Internet 6%

Source: Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism and Internet & American Life Project in partnership with the Knight Foundation, January 12-25, 2011 Local Information Survey. N=2,251 adults age 18 and older. Conducted in English and Spanish and included 750 cell phone interviews.

Why written media (cont'd)

- Elected officials pay close attention to the news
- First thing in the morning, the office of the speaker of the California Assembly sends a packet of newspaper clippings on key issues, including opinion editorials and letters, to the Assembly
- Legislative staffers read the newspapers from around the state and from their own district and alert the legislator on stories of interest
- Readership (numbers)

Newspapers by county

Contra Costa

Brentwood News

San Joaquin

Caravan News

Lodi News
Sentinel

The Stockton
Record

Sacramento

Sacramento Bee

Sacramento
Examiner

Solano

Daily Republic

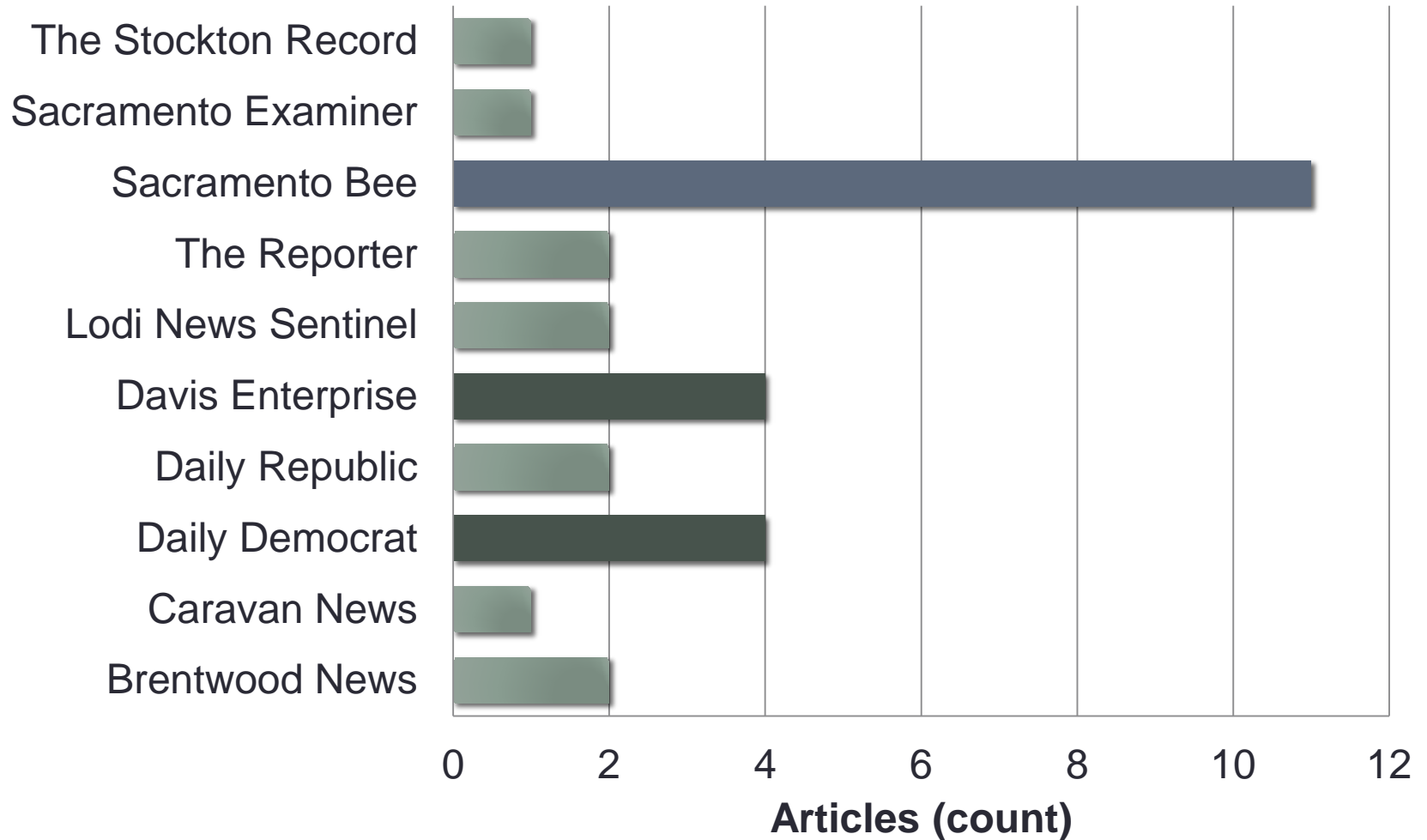
The Reporter

Yolo

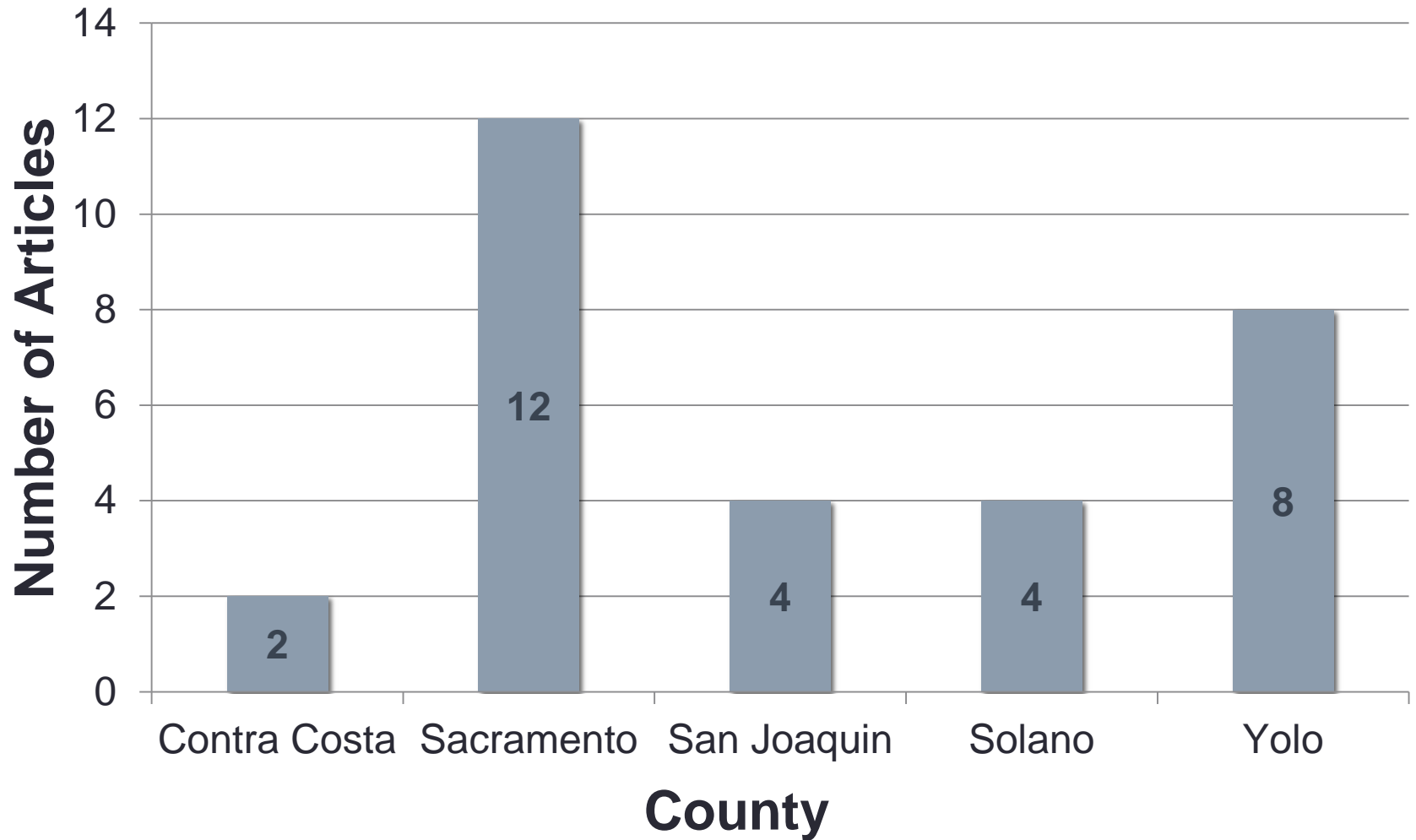
Daily Democrat

Davis Enterprise

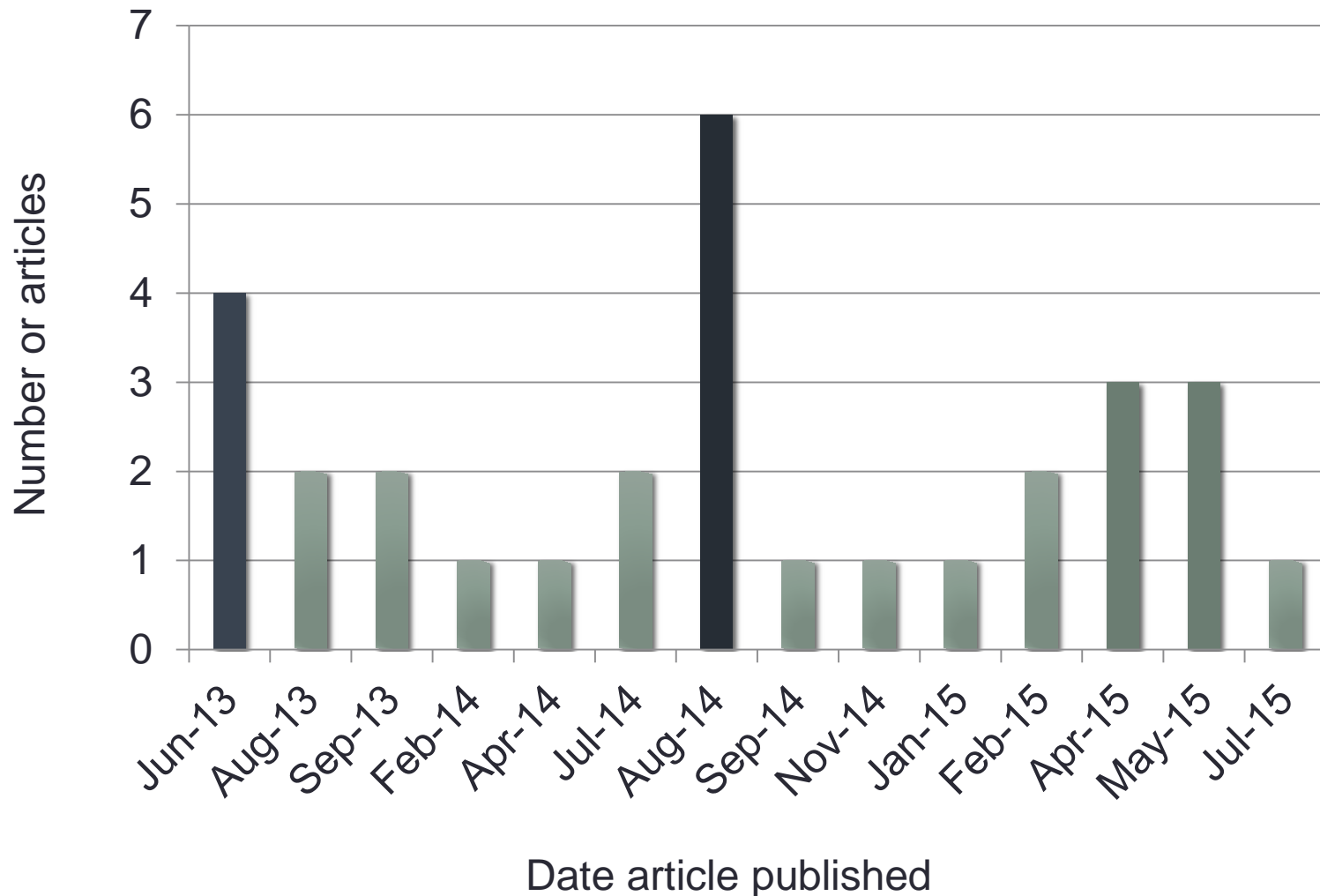
Number of Articles per Newspaper



Number of Articles per County



Timeline and Magnitude of Coverage



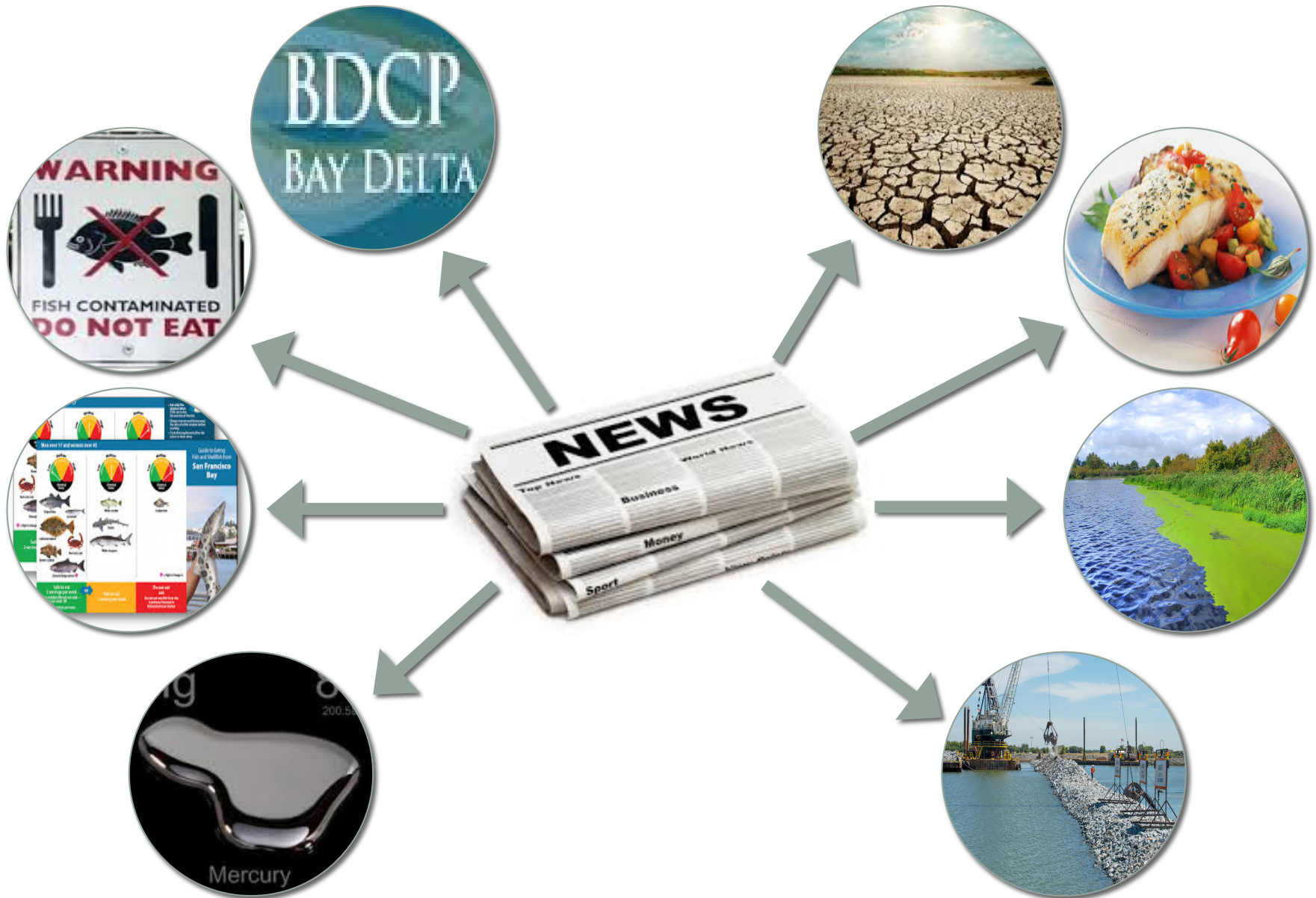


Behind the dates – News hooks

- **August 2014** – New Blue-Green Algae Health Advisory issued in San Joaquin County – two articles; four unrelated
- **June 2013** - Release of the results of the Contaminants in Fish from California Rivers and Streams, 2011, State Waterboards (May 2013), funded by the State Water Resources Control Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) – two articles
- **April, 2015** – Anniversary of the listing of the Delta smelt as threatened on the Endangered Species Act
- **May, July 2015** - Release of the revised water diversion plan by Governor Brown – five articles
- **July 2014** - Release of the fish consumption advisory for Cache Creek – two articles

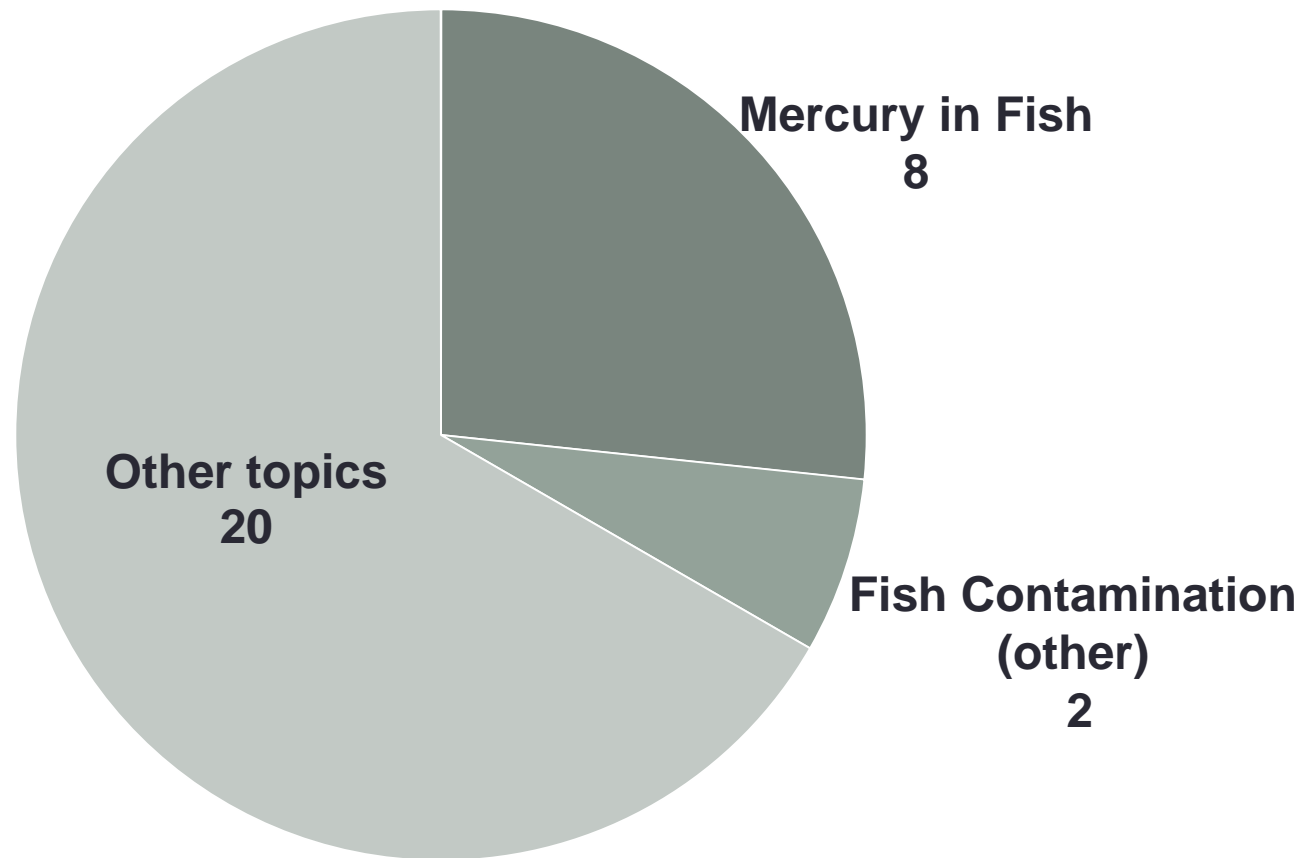


Issues Covered in the News





Breakdown of Article Topics



What journals published the articles on fish contamination issues

Contra Costa	Sacramento	San Joaquin	Solano	Yolo
Brentwood News	Sacramento Bee (3)	Caravan News	Daily Republic	Daily Democrat (3)
	Sacramento Examiner	Lodi News Sentinel	The Reporter	The Davis Enterprise (3)
		The Stockton Record (1)		



Who speaks for the issues

- Researchers, Academia (UC Davis, SFEI) – two names, five articles
- Researchers, Federal/state/local government – five names, five articles
- Federal/state/local government employees – six names, five articles
- Community Advocates – one name, in one article



Findings/Themes

- Only a third of the articles in our search discuss the issue of mercury in fish (10 out of 30)
- Of the **ten** articles on fish contamination, **eight** are about mercury in fish; two are about endocrine disruptors and masculinization effects in fish
- Of the eight articles about mercury in fish one mentions PCBs, one mentions pesticides (dieldrin, DDT) and one mentions both PCBs and pesticides; one of the researchers of the study talks about pesticides as being easier to deal with (than Hg) because they have identifiable sources



Findings/Themes

Of the eight articles about mercury in fish

- Six mention fish consumption advisories
- Five discuss sensitive populations (with various degrees of specificity)
- Four mention health effects
- Two mention the benefits of eating fish (one in a very general manner)

Did we find one single article that has it all

- Hg human health effects
- Sensitive populations
- Benefits of eating fish
- Advisories for fish consumption
- Translations
- Impacted communities

No, but we were close

- Hg human health effects ✓
- Sensitive populations ✓
- Benefits of eating fish ✗
- Advisories for fish consumption ✓
- Translations ✗
- Impacted communities ✓ ✗
- **Mercury removal**

Findings and Themes

- Only two article out of the eight on mercury in fish discusses both the **benefits and harms** associated with eating fish, with one doing it in a very non-specific manner - opportunity for us to do better about relaying the message from this angle
- There is a lack of harmonized **terminology** for the health effects of mercury in humans – “mental impairment and developmental disabilities, especially in fetuses and young children”, “impairment of motor skills in children”, “learning disabilities”, “memory and fertility problems in adults”, Hg is a “neurotoxin responsible for blindness, deafness and intellectual disabilities”.

Findings and Themes

- **Speakers** – They are mostly government representatives and researchers, only one community representative (from Capital, an umbrella Asian and Pacific Islander organization), so here is an opportunity for bringing the authentic voices that can tell the story from the perspective of the affected communities
- **Sensitive populations** - Mentioned in five of the eight articles on mercury in fish; the information is not always complete and/or accurate (i.e. “men and women 45 and older”)



Findings and Themes

- **Seven** out of the **eight** articles on Hg in fish are from Yolo and Sacramento, but no proposals received for these counties in response to the Delta MERP 2014-15 RFP
- Only **one** article out of **eight** talks about mercury in fish and fish consumption as a public health issue
- **No article triggered by public health related work done by a community organization**
- This is considered an environmental justice issue in the public health world, however, the only person who speaks about and names who these affected communities is a UC Davis Researcher, who appears in **three** out of the **eight** articles; he also expresses doubts about the effectiveness of advisories and signs in tackling the mercury in fish issue

Findings and Themes

- CDPH appears in just one article; OEHHA in four; State Waterboards in five, UC Davis as well in five; other organizations or agencies mentioned in the ten articles on fish contamination: USGS, Sierra Fund, Delta Stewardship Council, Capital (CBO), Natural Resources Agency, CalEPA, SFEI, Sacramento Mosquito and Vector Control District.
- TMDLs and the Clean Water Act mentioned in 1 out of 10 articles that discuss fish contamination issues
- The US EPA report on BDCP asserts that the water diversion plan could result in a potential increase in salinity, mercury and other chemicals concentrations, etc.
- Articles on blue-green algae warning signs examined to see what can be learned about who is doing the posting, who speaks for the issue, etc.

Conclusion and future directions

- Where we/our partners/grantees need to focus our efforts
- How to better use limited resources
- How to frame the issues to get more traction for involvement, the public's attention, etc.
- News hooks
- Reporters and newspapers
- Potential partners
- Public health tool
- Advocacy tool
- Evaluation tool



“If you don’t like the news, go out and make some of your own”

Scoop Njsker, SF Bay Area Radio Newscaster



Thank you!

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There is little doubt that how a society views major problems ... will be critical in how it acts on the problems”.

Henrik Blum, Health Planner

Questions?