

DEEPWATER HORIZON: CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS

Meta-Leadership Master Class



July 23, 2019

Eric J. McNulty, M.A.
emcnulty@hsph.harvard.edu





0 10 20 40 60 80 Miles

COMMON OPERATIONAL PICTURE DEEPWATER HORIZON

JULY 19
1500 CDT

OIL MOVEMENT

Leading Edge
Lat: 29°38' 6.485" N
Long: 86°59' 26.11" W



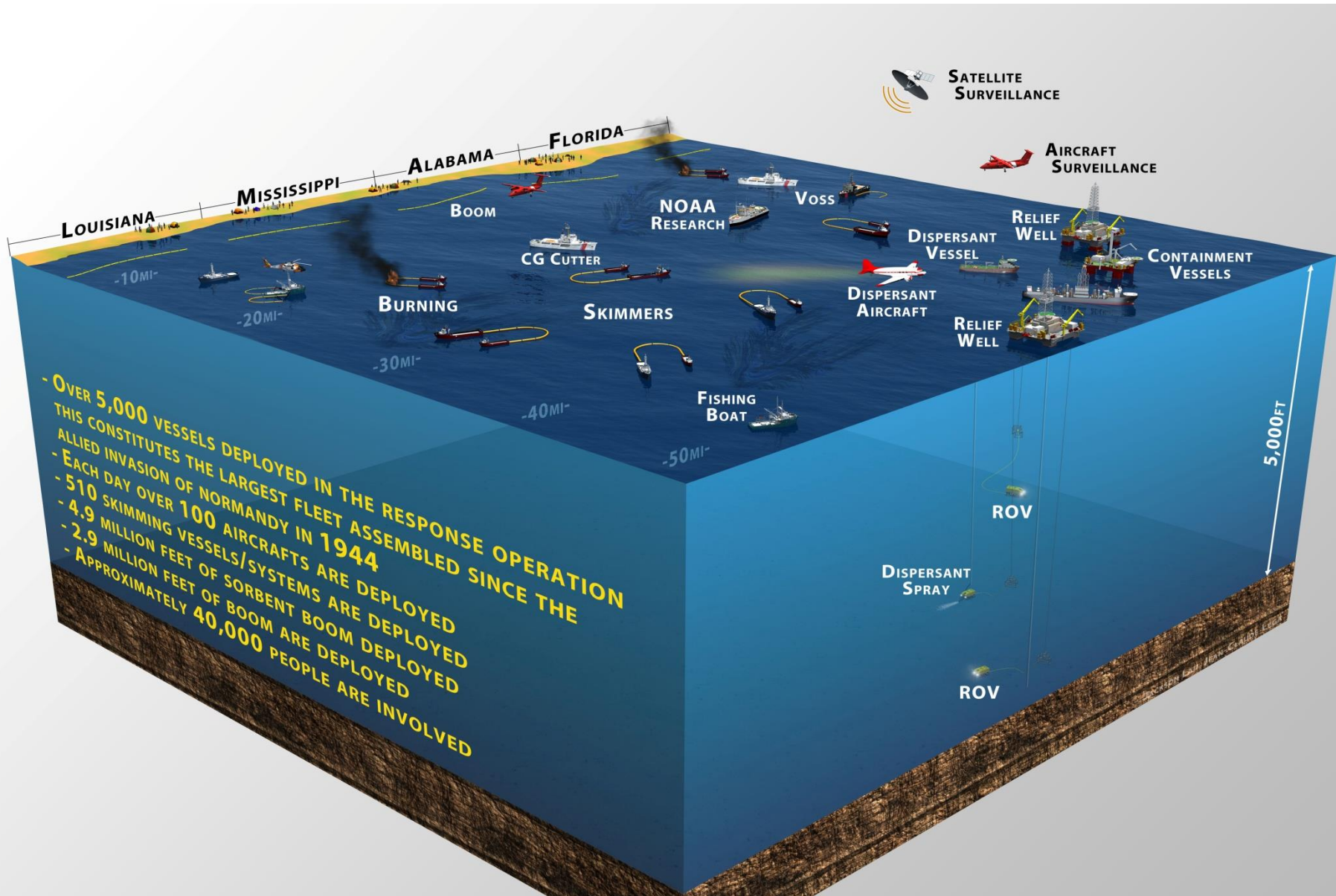
Burn & Dispersant Areas are Based Upon Proposed Areas That Hold High Possibilities of Dispersant Sprayable Oil. Activities Within Slick Areas e.g., Skimming Operations, In-Situ Burnings, etc., or Weather Conditions May Require Revisions to The Actual Operational Plan Implemented.

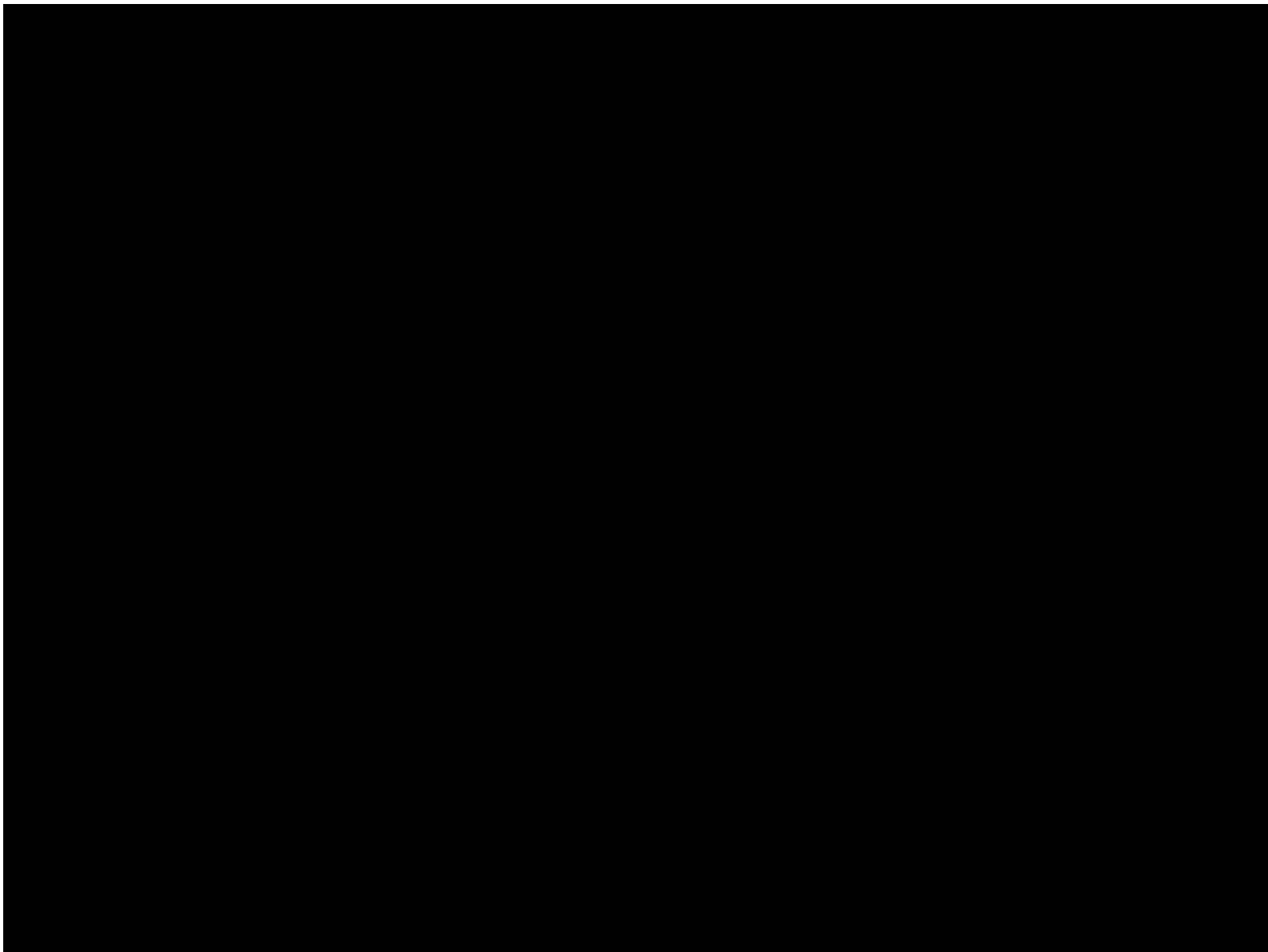
Satellite Oiling Extent 07/18/2010

SLAR Oiling Extent 07/19/2010

- Task Force
- Spill Site
- Boom Derived
- Source
- Branch
- Skimming Fleet
- ICP
- Area Command
- Staging Area
- Wildlife
- Planned Staging Area
- Decon Stations
- LA Shoreline Branch Boundaries
- Gulf Coast Divisions
- County/Parish
- LOOP Platform
- Branch Boundary
- Potential Oiling Extent
- SLAR Dash

Concept of Operations







STANDARD BEST PRACTICE

1. Be First
2. Be Right
3. Be Honest
4. Express Empathy
5. Promote Action
6. Show Respect

EVERY CRISIS HAS THREE NARRATIVES



WHAT YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN

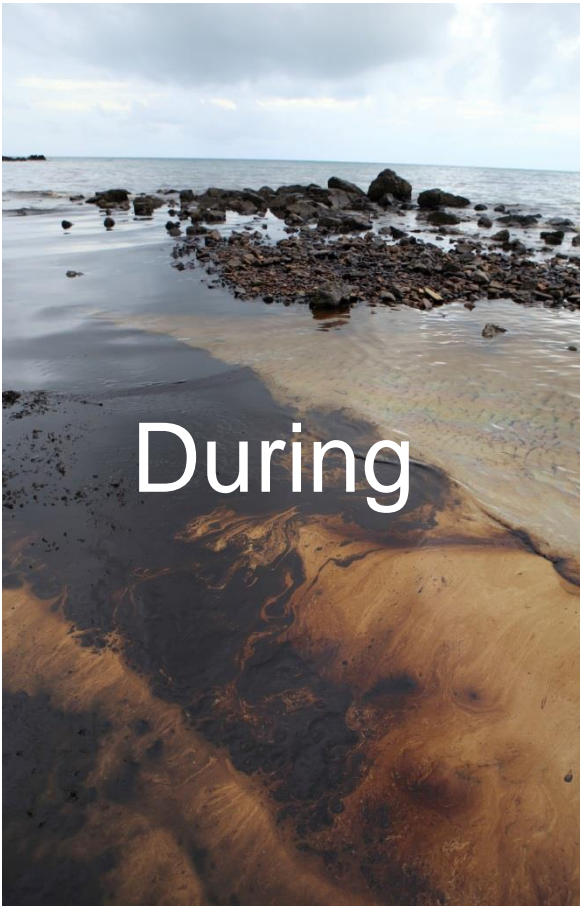


- Scenarios, Plans, and Exercises
- Focus on Operations
- High Rational/Low Emotional
- Limited Stakeholders in the Room
- Audience: Well-educated, Knows the Technical Jargon

BUILDING TRUST



WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS



- Gaps Between Plan and Reality
 - Economic Risk
 - Environmental Risk
 - Health Risk
 - Reputation Risk



THE NARRATIVE SHIFT



The Need for Code Switching

CODE SWITCHING

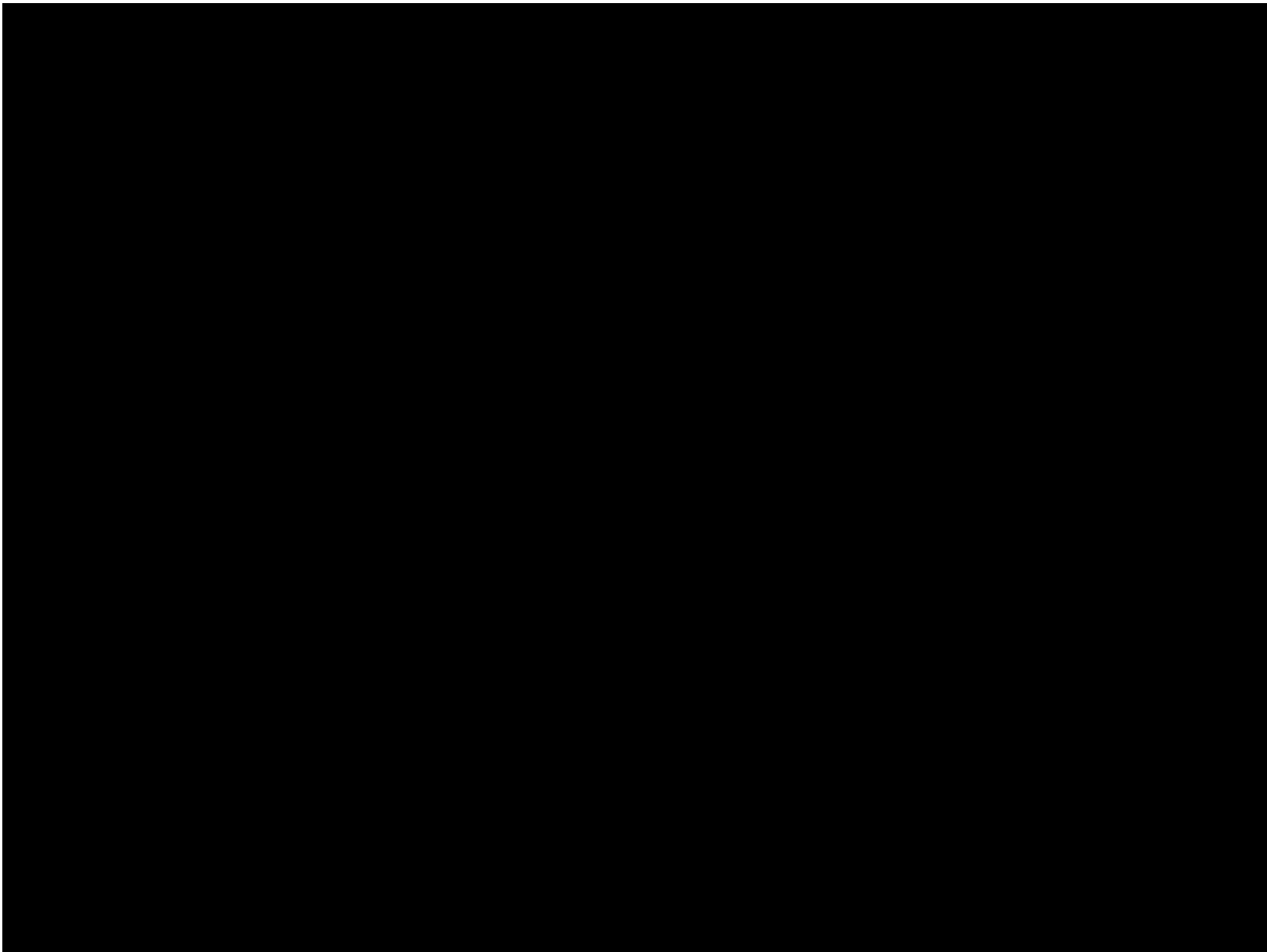
- Low Rational/High Emotional
- Many Stakeholders in the Mix
 - Audience Varies Greatly in its Attitudes and Understanding of Technical Jargon
 - You aren't the only voice
- A New Story with Heroes, Victims, and Villains



COMPETING NARRATIVES



- Who has the best credentials?
- Who has the most credibility?
- Who wins the battle of the narratives?



EXPLAINING SCIENCE

“The tremendous biodiversity of meiofauna in the deepsea area of the Gulf of Mexico we studied has been reduced dramatically,” said Jeff Baguley, Ph.D., University of Nevada, Reno expert on meiofauna, small invertebrates that range in size from 0.042 to 0.300 millimeters in size that live in both marine and fresh water. “Nematode worms have become the dominant species at sites we sampled that were impacted by the oil. So though the overall number of meiofauna may not have changed much, it’s that we’ve lost the incredible biodiversity.”

Flesch-Kinkaid Grade Level	11
Average Grade Level (Five Indices)	12.4

COGNITIVE BIAS

Implicit Attitude Bias: We judge in 7 seconds

Confirmation Bias: We reaffirm our world view

Availability Bias: We grab the nearest evidence

Outcome Bias: We equate outcome with process

IT'S ALL SOCIAL NOW



DON'T FORGET TO LISTEN



THE NARRATIVE SHIFT

AGCTCCGGTTCCCAAACGATCAAGGGCGA
GTTTAGCTCCTTCGGTCCCTCCGATCGTT
TGGGTTATGGCAGCACTGCATAATTCTC

The Need for Code Switching

TCCTGGCCGGCGCAAAACGGGGAATAA
ATCATTGGAAAAACGTTCTTCGGGGGCGA
AGTTTCGATGTAAACCACTCGTGCACCC
GTTTTCTGGGGTGAGCAAAAAACAGGGAAG

THE LEGACY NARRATIVE

- High rational/Lower Emotional
 - Regulatory Hearings
 - Commission Reports
 - Litigation
 - And Maybe a Feature Film



QUESTIONS



BUILDING YOUR NARRATIVES



TEA BREAK

Eric J. McNulty, MA
emcnulty@hsph.harvard.edu