

Memo

To: Dr. Nancy Coppola, NJIT MSPTC 601 Colleagues
From: Mo Adeyoju, MSPTC 601 Student
Date: 11/18/2010
Re: Evaluation of the Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division (DMRD) Website (www.dhmo.org)

As required, I am writing this memo after conducting a review of www.dhmo.org. The purpose of this memo is to provide a report on the credibility and trustworthiness of the website, its content and author(s).

Technology today provides every individual with access to web platforms that allow them to present themselves as all sorts of things on all sorts of issues. One of the most vulnerable areas is health and wellbeing as this is usually dear to peoples' hearts. It is easier now, more than ever before, to prey on people's fears about, and concern for their health.

It has thus become more imperative that we verify information that is presented to us so that we do not rely on inaccurate information.

My review of the website was conducted based on the accepted criteria for information resource research and is presented under these topics: Authority, Accuracy, Audience, Objectivity, Currency, Coverage and Quality of Page.

1. Authority

Upon initial review, www.dhmo.org appears to be an initiative in conjunction with a government agency, the United States Environmental Assessment Center. The site is presented as though this center is affiliated with DHMO.org and shares responsibility for the site's content. However, on closer review, it becomes obvious that this is a clever presentation of graphics and information by the site's author, Tom Way. It appears that Tom Way created the DHMO website using a fictitious government agency to make the site's message about dihydrogen monoxide seem credible.



Figure I: Logos on www.dhmo.org homepage

Apart from Tom Way, no other name is as being responsible for information on the site. Rather, the site appears to be soliciting concerned citizens to submit their information to be featured. There is no verification process that ensures submitted content is checked for accuracy; in fact, right above Tom Way's name on the bottom of the homepage, there is a warning "note: content veracity not implied"



Figure II: Content disclaimer on homepage

The only contact information presented on the website are email addresses – research@dhmo.org, feedback@dhmo.org and director@dhmo.org – there are no phone numbers or physical addresses that can be used to ascertain that the Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division(DMRD) actually exists in Newark, DE, as stated. It is unusual for an organization not to present a mailing address or telephone numbers for contact.

Beneath the call for feedback is a note stating that "Due to the high volume of email we receive, we may not be able to reply to every letter. However, we **do** read them all."¹ This looks like a clever way of letting those who initiate contact know not to expect responses to emails.

2 Accuracy

One of the easiest ways of verifying the accuracy of presented information is reviewing the credentials of listed sources and subject matter experts. On the DMHO site, no source credentials are cited or where sources are listed, there is no means to verify the information e.g. there is a reference to research conducted by US-award winning scientist Nathan Zohar² but there is no additional information about Nathan Zohner, his past works or even the award received. The same obtains for research work supposedly conducted by US scientists Patrick K. McCluskey and Matthew Kulick.³

As another example, in the one place where it appears that credential information is presented, (<http://dhmo.org/milk.html>), the bio page of the authority cited, Dr. Donna Maria Waltz, yields:

- No exact information about her past employers to lend credibility to her authority. The only actual employer listed is the [FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine](#). However, clicking this link reveals that the site for the government-owned FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine is www.fda.gov/cvm⁴ and not www.cvm.fda.gov as is linked on the DHMO site.

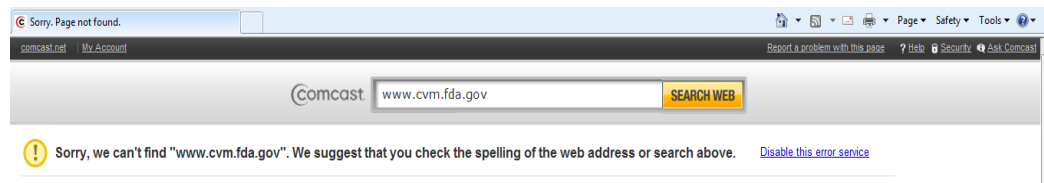


Figure III: error message from clicking on [FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine](#)

This could be attributed to a typographical error but in all likelihood, it is probably another clever way to misrepresent information so that an unaware visitor will unknowingly click through to the FDA website and believe that the information there is directly linked to Dr. Waltz.

- A link to Ohio State University where Dr. Waltz is supposed to have received her degree – there is no information about her course of study and the link actually presents information about list servers used by Ohio State University.
- A link to the main page of the University of Minnesota – again Dr. Waltz is supposed to have received her degree from this school but it is not clear what her course of study was.
- A link to Owenlea Farms, a site that has not been updated in 8 years (clearly stated on the site).



Figure IV: Owenlea Farm Homepage

The end result after viewing all this information the inability to ascertain who Dr. Waltz is, her credibility as an expert on dihydrogen monoxide.

Overall, there is no way to verify the accuracy of information or credibility of persons listed as researchers on the site.

3. Audience

The purpose of this website is stated on the homepage as “to provide an unbiased data clearinghouse and a forum for public discussion”⁵. The inference is that this is a site developed for use by any persons who are concerned about the adverse effects of dihydrogen monoxide. It is designed as an educational website for individuals seeking information about DHMO. This is further substantiated by the site’s call for concerned citizens to send in their information about DHMO to be posted on the website.

4. Objectivity

The entire site seems to be geared towards biasing visitors into thinking DHMO is a real and imminent danger that leads to all sorts of ailments including the worst cancers. According to the site, all the research conducted on DHMO by concerned members of the public leads to the same conclusion: DHMO should be banned. Even in places where the initial research results showed a contrary result, a site revisit always resulted in a change in people’s minds. This raises a question about the objectivity of the site.

In addition to this, there is a lot of advertising content on the site:



Figure V: Link to DHMO store

The DHMO store offers:

- DHMO t-shirts
- DHMO fact book
- Educator's kit and
- DHMO Hazmat vial



Figure VI: Link to Amazon.com



Figure VII: Link advertising Acme Klein bottles

5. Currency

The only dated page is the home page but it is possible to ensure that once a visitor clicks on the site the information is updated to show the current day's date as the date of the last update so this by means guarantees that the site is updated regularly. Apart from some really old copyright information, there is no revision information presented on any other page.

There is no way to tell how frequently the site is updated; information to this effect is not presented anywhere.

Links to external websites appear to be the only links that are current. That can be attributed to the fact that only the linked external sites are authentic sites. Two of the sites listed as DHMO sites are also stated as not working:

- **Anti-Dihydrogen Monoxide Coalition (out of business)**

- [Coalition to Ban Dihydrogen Monoxide \(Headquarters\)](#) (currently offline)

6. Coverage

This appears to be a complete website; no information is displayed that may lead the visitor to believe the site is under construction.

There appears to be no print equivalent, or at least there is no information that shows where this may be found.

7. Quality of Page

Not all the links work, some lead to pages with information that is completely irrelevant to DHMO while others present confusing information.

The entire site is confusing and has too much going on.

Sources

¹Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division (DMRD). *Dihydrogen Monoxide - DHMO Homepage*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhmo.org>

²Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division (DMRD). *Dihydrogen Monoxide – Facts about DHMO*. Retrieved from <http://dhmo.org/facts.html>

³Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division (DMRD). *Dihydrogen Monoxide – Facts about DHMO*. Retrieved from <http://dhmo.org/facts.html>

⁴Culled from <http://www.fda.gov/AboutFDA/CentersOffices/CVM/default.htm>

⁵Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division (DMRD). *Dihydrogen Monoxide - DHMO Homepage*. Retrieved from <http://www.dhmo.org>