

California Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region

Bob Anderson, Chairman

www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast

5550 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, California 95403

Phone: (877) 721-9203 (toll free) • Office: (707) 576-2220 • FAX: (707) 523-0135

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 20, 2009

Contact: Clayton Creagher
Regional Water Board
707-576-2666

AGENCIES WARN TO AVOID EXPOSURE TO TOXIC BLUE GREEN ALGAE IN THREE NORTHERN CA RIVERS

Santa Rosa-The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) and the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services, and Division of Environmental Health (DEH), are urging swimmers, boaters, and recreational users to avoid contact with blue-green algae (BGA) now blooming in the following locations: the Klamath River from its intersection with I-5 downstream to Happy Camp, and the South Fork Eel and Van Duzen Rivers (northern CA).

"A blue-green algae bloom can present a health hazard to those swimming or playing in the river, especially children and pets. We recommend that people stay out of the water where significant algae are present, and keep their dogs out of these areas," said Catherine Kuhlman, Director of the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Rosa.

On the Klamath River, monitoring conducted by the Karuk Tribe as part of the Klamath Basin Water Quality Monitoring Group, has confirmed the presence of blue green algae and related toxins above action levels at several locations from the I-5 rest stop downstream to Happy Camp. Public access points have been posted with signs advising no water contact, amending similar postings in June for Iron Gate and Copco Reservoirs, and in July for the Klamath River near the Iron Gate Hatchery.

At the South Fork Eel River in Phillipsville, a dog died after swimming on July 27; this is believed to be poisoning by blue green algae toxins. Tests have confirmed that a toxin produced by some blue green algae is present in the river at this location at levels exceeding those considered safe. DEH has now posted the Phillipsville area with advisory signs that recommend no water contact, and is in the process of posting other parts of the South Fork Eel River with warning signs. The Van Duzen River between Van Duzen County Park and Grizzly Creek State Park was posted with similar signs a few weeks ago. Due to a lack of monitoring resources DEH and the Regional Water Board have been unable to confirm the extent of algal blooms on the South Fork of the Eel and Van Duzen Rivers. Therefore, the agencies are asking the public to look for the presence of algal scums before having contact with water in either of these rivers and heed posted warning signs.

We are aware of 11 dog deaths that occurred shortly after contact with fresh water bodies in Humboldt and Mendocino Counties since 2001, including the dog that died after swimming in the Van Duzen River earlier this summer. These may have been caused by blue-green algae poisoning.

The algal blooms can look like green, blue-green, white, or brown foam, scum or mats floating on the water. Dogs are especially vulnerable to BGA poisoning because they tend to drink more water and lick algae off their fur. Children are vulnerable because they play in shoreline areas, drink more water than adults when swimming, and are of small body size. Accidentally drinking or swallowing contaminated water can be dangerous. Dogs can die as quickly as within an hour of leaving the water.

Potential symptoms in dogs following exposure to toxins can include lethargy, difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle rigidity or convulsions. The symptoms may have a very rapid onset. Toxins can cause people to experience eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea, and cold or flu-like symptoms.

The Statewide Guidance on Harmful Algal Blooms recommends the following:

- Avoid wading and swimming in water containing visible blooms or water containing algal scums or mats, which are most often present on the shoreline.
- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water or swim through scums or mats, nor lick their fur after going in the water; wash exposed pets in clean drinking water.
- If no algal scums or mats are visible, you should still carefully watch young children and warn them not to swallow the water.
- Do not drink, cook or wash dishes with untreated river water.
- Consume fish only after removing guts and liver, and rinsing fillets in clean drinking water, mussels should not be consumed.
- Get medical treatment right away if you think that you, your pet, or your livestock might have been poisoned by blue green algae toxins. Be sure to alert your doctor or vet to possible contact with blue green algae.
- If your pet exhibits these symptoms, collect and freeze vomit and/or diarrhea in clean plastic bags or containers, to allow for analysis by State authorities.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people can still visit the Klamath, South Fork Eel, and Van Duzen Rivers and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, canoeing, picnicking or other recreational activities excluding direct contact with the algae bloom scum.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Contact the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board - Clayton Creager at 707-576-2666 or ccreager@waterboards.ca.gov. If you have questions about medical treatment, call your doctor. For further information on animal health, contact the State Animal Health Branch at (707) 826-1658.

The following websites provide more detail on blue green algae:

California Department of Public Health:
<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/environhealth/water/Pages/bluegreenalgae.aspx>
State Water Resources Control Board:
http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/bluegreen_algae/
National Center for Disease Control:
<http://www.cdc.gov/hab/cyanobacteria/facts.htm>

State Water Resources Control Board
Office of Public Affairs
Phone: 916.341.5254
Fax: 916.341.5252
Email: info@waterboards.ca.gov