

California Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region

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U.S. EPA, State and tribes, warn against Klamath River blue-green algae. Contact with blue-green algae can cause eye irritation, skin rash, tingling. Caution urged when consuming fish.

Friday June 19, 2009

San Francisco - Due to its potential health risks, federal, state, and tribal agencies are urging swimmers, boaters and recreational users to avoid contact with blue-green algae now blooming in Iron Gate and Copco Reservoirs on the Klamath River in Northern California.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and California agencies including the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Office of Environmental Health and Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), Department of Public Health, and the Yurok and Karuk Tribes urge residents and recreational water users of the Klamath River to use caution or avoid getting in the water near these blooms, especially during the upcoming summer months.

Blue-green algae can pose health risks. People and their pets should avoid contact with the blooms, and particularly avoid swallowing or inhaling water spray in an algal bloom area.

The algal blooms look like green, blue-green, white or brown foam, scum or mats floating on the water. Recreational exposure to toxic blue-green algae can cause eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcer, vomiting, diarrhea, cold and flu-like symptoms, tingling, headaches, numbness and shaking. Liver failure, nerve damage and death have occurred in rare situations where large amounts of contaminated water were directly ingested.

"This is a situation that anyone who comes into contact with water at Copco or Iron Gate should be aware of. Vacationers and the public should adjust their activities accordingly", said Catherine Kuhlman, Executive Officer, North Coast Regional Water Board. Algal toxins have been detected in fish from Copco and Iron Gate reservoirs in past years, however, the risk posed to human health by consuming fish is still being determined by OEHHA. "Until then, people should limit or avoid eating fish caught in areas of a water body where a bloom exists. The precautions that we are recommending are reasonably simple and based on common sense."

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;
- 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 surface water under any circumstances;
- People should limit or avoid eating fish from waters which previously tested positive for an algal toxin as the risk to human health is being evaluated by public health authorities;
- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water or swim through heavy scums or mats, nor lick their fur after going in the water; and
- Get medical treatment right away if you think that you, your pet, or livestock might have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with blue-green algae.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact and when eating fish from the reservoirs, people can still visit Iron Gate and Copco reservoirs and the river areas and enjoy camping, hiking, biking, canoeing, picnicking or other recreational activities excluding direct contact with the algal bloom scum. For more information, please visit:

World Health Organization Guidelines for Drinking Water Quality, 3rd Edition:

www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/dwg/gdwq3/en/index.html

California Department of Public Health:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/envirohealth/water/Pages/Bluegreenalgae.aspx>

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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>

Siskiyou County Public Health Department:

<http://www.co.siskiyou.ca.us/phs/>

(530) 841-2100

County of Humboldt, Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Branch

<http://co.humboldt.ca.us/health/envhealth/>

(707) 445-6215

Yurok Tribe Real Time Water Quality and BGA Data

<http://exchange.yuroktribe.nsn.us/lrqsclient/stations/stations.html>