Q. Can algae blooms be treated?

Treating blooms with herbicides, copper sulphate or other algicides is not advisable because these treatments may break open algae cells and release more toxins into the water. Blooms should be left to run their course and dissipate on their own usually within a few weeks. The mitigation of algae blooms is better accomplished through preventative rather than remedial measures.

If you see it, avoid it!

Q. How can blooms be reduced or prevented?

Blooms of blue-green algae may form when nutrients are readily available in the surface water body. Therefore, taking steps to reduce or prevent additional sources of these nutrients from entering the water can reduce the occurence of blue-green algae blooms.

Preventative steps include:

- Using phosphate-free detergents;
- Not using fertilizers and maintaining a natural shoreline;
- Taking steps to reduce agricultural run-off;
- Ensuring septic systems are maintained properly;
- Using soaps and household products that are phosphate-free.

Do you suspect a Blue-green algae bloom?

Call the Ministry of Environment Spills Action Centre at:

1-800-268-6060

If you have questions regarding the potential bloom, call the North Bay-Parry Sound District Health Unit at:

705-746-5801

Any Health Unit Advisory will remain in effect for approximately 4 weeks until the bloom dissipates.

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Blue-Green Algae

THE FACTS

STEWARDSHIP SEGUIN

What You Need to Know

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IF YOU SEE IT, AVOID IT!

How can I recognize a blue-green algae bloom?

Blooms most commonly look like bluish-green pea soup; however, olive-green and red blooms have also been reported. When the bloom is very large, algae may form solid-looking clumps. Fresh blooms often smell like newly mown grass while older blooms smell like rotting garbage.

Q: What is blue-green algae?

Cyanobacteria, commonly called blue-green algae, are primitive microscopic organisms that have inhabited the earth for over 2 billion years. They have the potential to produce toxins and other harmful components but they can also be harmless. They are bacteria, but have visual features in common with the non-toxic green algae which makes it difficult to tell them apart.

Q: Why are some lakes more susceptible to blooms?

Some lakes appear to be more likely than others to have frequent blooms. Excessive nutrients are probably the most important factors, but some lakes with relatively low nutrients still have blooms while some lakes with high nutrient levels do not. Blooms tend to thrive in areas where the water is shallow, slow moving and warm.

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STEWARDSHIP SEGUIN

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Q: Should I be concerned about blue-green algae?

It is prudent to be cautious about blue-green algae blooms. Although many varieties are harmless, blooms of blue-green algae may have the potential to produce toxins which may be harmful to human health and the health of animals.

Q: Is it OK for my pets to enter and drink the water?

If algae scum is floating on the water, block access to the affected water and provide another water source for them to drink. If they are exposed, rinse your pet with clean water immediately.

Q: Can I swim near an algae bloom?

Avoid areas with visible algae or scum. Direct contact and ingestion are associated with the greatest health risk. If no scums are visible, but water shows strong greenish discolouration, avoid swimming, immersion of head, and/or ingestion.

Q: Is my drinking water safe?

There is no effective home treatment to remove blue-green toxins from the water. This includes boiling, treating water with chlorine, and jug filtration systems. The only safe alternative is to use bottled water or water obtained from a municipal drinking water system.

Q: Is it safe to eat the fish?

Fish caught in affected waters pose unknown health risks and may have an undesirable taste. Eating fish from affected waters is not recommended.

Q: What about watering my vegetable garden?

Don't use water with blue-green algae to water edible plants (especially plants with edible parts exposed to the ground surface like lettuce, tomatoes and other salad vegetables). It is not known if fruits and vegetables absorb toxins from contaminated water.