

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



Media Release

North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

State and U.S. EPA warn against blue-green algae in Iron Gate and Copco Reservoirs

Contact with blue-green algae can cause eye irritation, skin rash.
Caution urged when consuming fish

August 17, 2011

Contact:
Clayton Creager: (707) 576-2666

Sacramento – 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 (cyanobacteria) now blooming in Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs on the Klamath River in Northern California.

Cyanobacteria (*Microcystis aeruginosa*) cell counts and toxin levels in Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs exceeded the public health advisory threshold in the most recent round of public health monitoring. California agencies including the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), Department of Public Health, as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Yurok and Karuk Tribes urge residents and recreational water users of Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs to use caution or avoid getting in the water near these blooms, especially during the upcoming summer months. Public health monitoring for the Klamath River from Link River Dam in Oregon to the estuary in California (including Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs) is conducted collaboratively by the United States Bureau of Reclamation, PacifiCorp, the Karuk Tribe, the Yurok Tribe, and the CA North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and United States Environmental Protection Agency.

“As blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) can pose health risks, especially to children and pets, we urge people to be careful where they swim when visiting these Reservoirs” said Catherine Kuhlman, Executive Officer of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. “We recommend that people and their pets 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, and cold and flu-like symptoms.

“This is a situation that anyone who comes into contact with water in Iron Gate or Copco Reservoirs should be aware of. Vacationers and the public should adjust their activities accordingly”, said Kuhlman.

The Statewide Guidance on Harmful Algal Blooms recommends the following:

- Avoid wading and swimming in water containing visible blooms or water containing algae, scums or mats.
- If no algae, 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; common water purification techniques (e.g., camping filters, tablets) may not remove toxins.
- If fish are consumed, remove guts and liver, and rinse meat in clean drinking water.
- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water or swim through heavy algae, scums or mats, nor lick their fur after going in the water. Rinse pets in clean drinking water to remove algae from fur.
- Get medical treatment immediately 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 people can still visit Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs and enjoy camping, hiking, biking, canoeing, picnicking, or other recreational activities, excluding direct contact with the algal bloom. **For more information, please visit:**

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

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

California Department of Public Health:

<http://www.cdph.ca.gov/healthinfo/vironhealth/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>

Siskiyou County Public Health Department:

(530) 841-2100