

# SPLASH INTO EXTENSION

## Did You Know?

2012 Marks the 40th Anniversary of the Clean Water Act: Everyone Lives in a Watershed

## What is Toxic Blue-green Algae?

Algae are microscopic plants occurring in all waters. Under the right combination of warmer water temperatures and nutrients (mainly phosphorus) nuisance algal populations can dominate a lake.

Although technically not true algae, what is referred to as toxic blue green algae refers to certain species of cyanobacteria that have the ability to produce toxins.

### What Does Toxic Algae Look Like?

- Water that has a neon green, pea green, blue-green or reddish-brown color.
- Water that has a bad odor.
- Foam, scum or a thick paint-like appearance on the water surface.
- Green or blue-green streaks on the surface or accumulations in bays and along shorelines.

**Risks and Symptoms:** Pets and livestock have died from drinking water containing toxic blue-green algae. The risks to humans comes from external exposure (prolonged contact with skin) and from swallowing the water. Symptoms from external exposure are skin rashes, lesions and blisters. More severe cases can include mouth ulcers, ulcers inside the nose, eye and/or ear irritation and blistering of the lips. Symptoms from ingestion can include headaches, nausea, muscular pains, central abdominal pain, diarrhea and vomiting. Severe cases could include seizures, liver failure, respiratory arrest-even death, although this is rare. The severity of the illness is related to the amount of water ingested, and the concentrations of the toxins.

**Is it safe to eat fish from lakes that have toxic algae?** The toxins have been found in the liver, intestines and pancreas of fish. Most information to date indicates that toxins do not accumulate significantly in fish tissue, which is the meat that most people eat. It is likely that the portions of the fish that are normally consumed would not contain these toxins. However, it is ultimately up to the public to decide whether they want to take the risk, even if it is slight. Anglers may want to practice catch and release at lakes containing toxic algae.

### Tips on What to Do & Things to Avoid:

- Be aware of areas with high concentrations of blue-green algae and keep animals and children away from the water.
- Do not swim or wade in water containing visible blue-green algae. Avoid direct contact with blue-green algae.
- Make sure children are supervised at all times when they are near the water.
- If you come into contact with blue-green algae, rinse off with fresh water as soon as possible.
- Do not boat or water ski through blue-green algae blooms.
- Do not drink the water and avoid any situation that could lead to swallowing the water.

**Private Lake & Pond Concerns** - Testing and maintenance of private lakes and ponds are at the discretion of the owner. The Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality reported that Midwest Laboratories is the only Nebraska laboratory currently offering toxic algae testing services for private entities wishing to have analysis conducted. Midwest Laboratories is located at 13611 B Street, Omaha, NE, 68144. They can be contacted at 402-334-7770.

**Public Lake Concerns** - Numerous public lakes throughout the state are sampled weekly. Every Friday the results are updated on the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality website <http://www.deq.state.ne.us> or call 402-471-0096 or 402-471-2186.