

Toxic algae continues to cover Keys canals

By Kathryn Reed

Tests on the water of the Tahoe Keys canals continue to show blue-green algae, also known as cyanobacteria.

The toxic algae have been in the lagoons of this South Lake Tahoe neighborhood since **at least Aug. 11.**

“Based on the levels being detected in last week’s samples, coupled with the site-indicators present (floating scum, blue-green color), we recommended that TKPOA continue to post caution advisories and advise pet owners to be especially careful if their dog might play in the affected water. Unlike a human, a dog can be exposed to the toxin by drinking the water, eating a glob of algae that might contain the toxins, and further by grooming their coats when they get out of the water with saturated fur,” Mary Fiore-Wagner, senior environmental scientist with Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She sent an email to veterinarians about the low levels of cyanotoxins – Anatoxin-A and microcystin that were found in water samples last week and the potential harm to dogs. Detailed information was sent to the doctors so they would be aware of symptoms.

Tahoe Keys Property Owners Association took additional water samples on Aug. 28. The results are not in yet.

The blooms are improving in some locations, but have developed in others. Cyanobacteria blooms can look like slicks of opaque, bright green paint, or “pea soup,” but closer inspection often reveals the grainy, sawdust-like appearance of individual colonies, according to the state Water Board.

“Next week we are coordinating with TKPOA to initiate a larger sampling effort throughout the Tahoe Keys waterways. EPA-Region 9 will be supporting the effort by funding analysis of one of the toxins being detected (microcystins). Analysis will be through the EPA-9 laboratory. Additionally, several field duplicates samples – samples collected at the same time, from the same location – will be collected and run at a commercial laboratory paid for by TKPOA and the EPA-Region 9 laboratory for analysis of Anatoxin-A,” Fiore-Wagner said.

The state Department of Water Resources on Friday sent out information about the various algal blooms in California what with Labor Day weekend being big for boating and swimming.

The Keys has not limited boating activity in the contaminated canals, but human contact with those waters is not advised.

Toxic blue-green algae exposure can cause eye irritation, allergic skin rash, mouth ulcers, vomiting, diarrhea, and cold- and flu-like symptoms.

The state said, “Bloom conditions can change rapidly, and wind and waves may move or concentrate the bloom into different regions of the lakes. Algal blooms can appear as blue-green, white or brown foam, scum, or mats that can float on the water’s surface and accumulate along shorelines and boat ramp areas.”

Here are the statewide guidelines regarding waters with blue-green algae:

- Take care that pets and livestock do not drink the water, swim through algae, scums, or mats or lick their fur after going in the water. Rinse pets in clean water to remove algae from fur.

- Avoid wading, swimming, and jet or water skiing in water containing algae blooms, scums, or mats.

- Do not drink, cook, or wash dishes with untreated surface water from these areas under any circumstances; common water purification techniques such as camping filters, tablets, and boiling do not remove toxins.

- People should not eat mussels or other bivalves collected from affected waters. Limit or avoid eating fish taken from these waters; if fish are consumed, remove the guts and liver, and rinse fillets in clean drinking water.

- Get medical treatment immediately if you think you, your pet or livestock have been poisoned by blue-green algae toxins. Be sure to alert the medical professional to the possible contact with blue-green algae.