

# Ebel: It is up to us to stop harmful algal blooms

Joe Ebel, Guest Columnist    Published 8:54 a.m. ET July 6, 2019

Over the past few years we have been hearing a lot about Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs), but most people are not aware of the impact that HABs have had on the public drinking water systems and recreational areas across Ohio.

Cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) are microscopic organisms found naturally in surface water that can sometimes multiply to form harmful algal blooms (HABs). HABs are "harmful" because they can produce toxins capable of causing illness or irritation, liver damage, and sometimes even death, in pets, livestock and humans.

Excess nitrogen and phosphorus that enter lakes and streams can feed these algae and promote rapid growth, or blooms. These nutrients typically come from runoff of over-fertilized farm fields and lawns, from malfunctioning septic systems, and manure run-off from livestock operations.

The most dramatic impact of HABs in Ohio resulted in a ban on the use of the City of Toledo water supply for drinking, cooking and bathing in August of 2014, affecting 400,000 residents. Cities that draw their drinking water from lakes, rivers and reservoirs are vulnerable to the toxins produced by HABs, and must monitor their source water regularly and employ special treatment methods to assure that their drinking water does not exceed OEPA standards.

Recreation is also impacted by these blooms, from Lake Erie to the Ohio River, and everywhere in between. Warm summer waters, sunny weather, and excess nutrients set the stage for HABs every summer. Locally, Buckeye Lake's beaches have been under a Recreational Public Health Advisory due to cyanotoxin levels since the end of April 2019. More recently, elevated toxin levels were also identified at Dillon Lake.

In a cooperative effort between the Ohio Department of Health, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and local health departments (with public beaches within their jurisdictions), a Bathing Beach Monitoring program is offered on the state's BeachGuard website <http://publicapps.odh.ohio.gov/beachguardpublic/>, where you can check the status of bathing beaches across Ohio.

The good news is that we can move from just responding to HABs toward a prevention model. Human activity due to fertilizer and manure run-off and failing sewage treatment systems have led to the current crisis. By changing our behaviors and investing in better farming practices and wetland restoration to remove excess nutrients from our waterways, we can restore their water quality so that we and future generations can all enjoy Ohio's great freshwater resources.

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