



RECYCLED WATER

Blue-green algae outbreaks



What is Blue-green Algae?

Blue-green algae (BGA) is the common name for a group of algae with similar characteristics. When they encounter the right combination of conditions in a body of water they can multiply rapidly. These conditions are:

- › Still water that is clear enough for light to penetrate;
- › Warm temperature;
- › Adequate nutrients including phosphorous and nitrogen in the water;
- › When the mass of algae float to the surface, a vivid green bloom can appear overnight.



What are the signs to look for?

- › A sudden change in water colour overnight due to the appearance of a mass of vivid green algae (scum) floating to the surface of the water;
- › Scums can be green, blue-green or khaki green, and can turn brown/green or white once dying off;
- › Scums may appear at dusk or dawn and disappear during the day;
- › There may be a strong earthy smell, or if the bloom is breaking down it may produce a strong rotting smell.

Why it is a problem?

Some species of blue-green algae in large numbers or 'blooms' can produce toxins and can have serious health implications for humans, animals and birds drinking or coming into contact with the water. While not all blooms are toxic, they should be treated as toxic until the water has been tested.

Typical symptoms for people who have ingested water contaminated with blue-green algae include gastroenteritis, diarrhoea and vomiting. Avoid all contact, including skin contact, with blue-green algae.

Livestock are also at risk of poisoning by blue-green algae unless alternative drinking water supplies are provided, although livestock deaths are relatively rare. Livestock productivity will be reduced with milder cases of algae poisoning.



What to do

Inspect farm dams regularly (2 or 3 times a week) during hot and dry times of the year.

If you suspect that you have a blue-green algae bloom:

- › Isolate all people and livestock from the dam or water supply;
- › Ensure livestock have alternative drinking water supplies;
- › Contact a veterinarian if livestock show symptoms of poisoning;
- › Collect water for testing following the sampling procedure detailed below;
- › Send the sample for testing as soon as possible.

What not to do

If you suspect that you have a blue-green algae bloom in your dam, do not:

- › Drink or swim in the water;
- › Use the water on pastures, crops, gardens, vegetables, grapes or fruit;
- › Allow stock to drink the water.

Please note:

Boiling the water will not make it safe to use.

Sampling of the water

1

Use gloves to avoid skin contact with affected water.

2

Collect algae from the windward side of the dam, so that the sample is as concentrated as possible.

3

Collect about one litre of water in a clean plastic container/bottle, leaving an air gap at the top of the bottle.

4

Label the bottle clearly with your name, address and telephone number.

5

Contact a laboratory regarding best delivery arrangements.

Further information

For further information and advice on testing laboratories and Blue-green algae, please contact our Recycled Water Officer at Coliban Water on 1300 363 200.



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Disclaimer: Information contained in this document was correct at the time of printing (September 2008). Coliban Water reserves the right to alter information, as deemed necessary.