

Democrat and Chronicle

Officials: Avoid contact with Sodus Bay water

Steve Orr • Staff writer • August 28, 2010

SODUS — Local officials said Friday they would redouble efforts to inform the public about an outbreak of potentially dangerous cyanobacteria in Sodus Bay that has closed two beaches and prompted warnings to avoid tainted water.

Leaders of Wayne County, the towns of Sodus and Huron and the village of Sodus Point said they may use posters, reverse 911 calls to bayside residents, mailings and even a door-to-door campaign to inform people to avoid tainted water.

"We've got to get the word out there," said Laurie Crane, Huron town supervisor.

At a meeting Friday morning in Town Hall, the officials said word had to be spread quickly. This weekend, promising warm, sunny weather, will draw visitors to the popular bay — and [Labor Day](#) weekend, typically vacationers' last big summer hurrah, follows.

The bay, about 40 miles from Rochester on Lake [Ontario](#), has been beset for several weeks by outbreaks of the bacteria, commonly known as blue-green algae. Residents have complained they were learning of the problem mainly through word-of-mouth, and that government agencies had provided no information or advice.

Officials have said the cyanobacteria outbreak at Sodus Bay is the worst they've seen there. Such events, though, are not rare in upstate lakes. In the past, the bacteria have been noted in Conesus, Silver and Cayuga lakes, among numerous others.

Honeoye Lake belongs on the list, too, based on the situation there now. On Friday, material that's identical in appearance and smell to Sodus Bay's blue-green algae was evident in several small coves on the west side of the small Ontario County Finger Lake. Dead fish were floating at several spots.

The algae seemed to be much more widespread along the west shore a few days ago, said Bud Dluzak, who recently moved there. "I didn't even want to take my [boat](#) out in it," he said. "Blue, green, white — it was all kind of colors."

Northwest winds have pushed most of the material over to Honeoye's east shore, Dluzak said.

State environmental officials said Friday they just heard of the apparent blue-green algae issue at Honeoye Friday morning and planned to check on it.

At Sodus, Nicholas Rich, district director for the state Department of [Health](#) in Geneva, reiterated Friday that people should avoid contact with bay water if there is visible evidence of an algae bloom nearby. He also said people should keep dogs and other pets from potentially tainted water as well.

Rich and others said residents on the east side of the bay who pump water from the bay for washing dishes and showering should stop doing so until the risk has passed.

Some varieties of cyanobacteria can release toxins that are harmful to human and animal health. Toxin has been found in Sodus Bay, though state health officials have released few details. Dead birds and fish have been noted near patches of the bacteria, including hundreds of dead fish in one area of southern Sodus Bay. A dog reportedly got sick after swimming in affected water and later was put down by its owner.

Rich said the department would do testing for cyanobacteria toxins at two beaches in Sodus Point that now are closed to swimmers due to algae concerns, and also at other strategic points around the bay. He was unable to say how extensive that testing would be.

The beaches are to remain closed until all signs of the algae are gone and subsequent testing by the health department shows them to be safe. Rich also said he would need to consult other health officials before saying whether it was safe to eat fish caught in the bay.

SORR@DemocratandChronicle.com