



**Date:** September 11, 2009

**General questions:** Jodi Sherwood, DHS, 503-480-4982

**Technical questions:** Curtis Cude, 971-673-0975 or Jerry Meyer, Douglas County Health Department, 541-440-3574

## **Public health advisory still in effect for portions of Elk Creek and Umpqua**

### **River - Toxin confirmed as cause of death in dog**

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A health advisory issued on September 4 by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Douglas County Health Department prompted by high algae toxin levels found in Elk Creek from the mouth at the Umpqua River to Elk Creek Tunnel on HWY 38, and the Umpqua River from Sawyers Rapids to the mouth of Elk Creek, located in and around Elkton remains in effect.

A dog that died suddenly after being in the water near Elk Creek in southern Oregon late last month has tested positive for *anatoxin-a*, a neurotoxin released by naturally occurring blue-green algae.

Algae blooms appear as thick foam or scum on the water's surface. They can be bright green, blue-green, white or brown in color.

"Unfortunately, you cannot tell if an algae bloom is toxic just by looking at it. If you come across areas of thick algae take precaution by avoiding water contact and keep pets out of the water," said Curtis Cude, Hazardous Incident Tracking program manager at DHS.

Water monitoring was conducted following the deaths of pet dogs in the area. Water monitoring has confirmed the presence of toxins harmful to humans and animals produced by blue-green algae, said Laura Boswell, Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program coordinator in DHS. The highest levels of toxins were found in stagnant pools adjacent to Elk Creek and the Umpqua River, and residual levels were found in Elk Creek at the mouth.

Swallowing or inhaling water droplets should be avoided, as well as skin contact with water by humans or animals. Drinking untreated water from these portions of Elk Creek and the Umpqua River, especially from stagnant pools, is especially dangerous. Boswell advised campers and other visitors that toxins cannot be removed by boiling, filtering or treating the water.

People who draw in-home water directly from an algae bloom-affected water body are advised to use an alternative water source. If their drinking water supplier draws from an affected water source, they may want to ask if the water has been tested. If the supplier has not tested the water, DHS recommends using another water source not affected by the bloom.

DHS recommends that people who choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present should remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking since toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues.

Exposure to toxins can produce symptoms of numbness, tingling and dizziness that can lead to difficulty breathing or heart problems and require immediate medical attention. Symptoms of skin irritation, weakness, diarrhea, nausea, cramps and fainting should also receive medical attention if they persist or worsen. Children and pets are particularly susceptible.

Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), in coordination with DHS, will continue to monitor area water quality for algae-related toxins. The public will be advised when the concern no longer exists.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people are encouraged to visit Elk Creek and the Umpqua River and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, catch-and-release fishing and bird watching. Boating is safe as long as speeds do not create excessive water spray, which could lead to inhalation risk.

For health information, contact the DHS, Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program, 971-673-0438 or [www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hab/](http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/ph/hab/); also the DHS toll-free information line at 1-877-290-6767, or the Douglas County Health Department at 541-440-3574 or [www.co.douglas.or.us/health/EH/default.asp](http://www.co.douglas.or.us/health/EH/default.asp).