

Toxic algae increases in Florida's Lake Okeechobee

July 3 2019, by Joe Mario Pedersen



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Recent tests results show that toxic amounts of blue-green algae have

surfaced in Lake Okeechobee, according to data released by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

The liquid heart of Florida is showing more signs of cyanobacteria [algae](#) blooms contaminating its arteries in Martin and Palm Beach counties new data shows.

There are 20 cyanobacteria species capable of producing toxic algae, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Microcystin blooms have appeared in blue and green patches on the eastern border of the [lake](#), according to the FDEP.

The return of toxic algae is terrible news for the 6 million residents of southeast Florida that rely on Lake Okeechobee for its [drinking water](#) in the event of a drought, according to the South Florida Water Management District.

Microcystin is deemed toxic at sample levels of 10 micrograms per liter of [water](#), according to the FDEP.

A sample taken from Port Mayaca, in Martin County, showed the presence was nearly three times stronger at 29 micrograms of the algae per liter, according to the FDEP.

The most recent presence of blue-green algae was found Monday at Canal Point, in Palm Beach County, but the sample levels have not yet been released.

Sample levels of another Canal Point test site were observed at six times higher than the toxicity point at 58 micrograms on Wednesday, according to the data.

Lake Okeechobee has tested positive for [blue-green algae](#) in other

isolated locations and first started showing signs of the algae earlier in June, but nearly all of the locations contained samples under the toxicity point.

The Blue-Green Algae Task Force gathered Monday for its second meeting of the year at the Lee County School Board to discuss improving water quality over the next five years, and how to reduce man-made fertilizing nutrients from entering Lake Okeechobee, which can cause blooms to grow much faster.

The dangers of bigger blooms grow stronger during hurricane season, according to research by the University of Florida. Tropical storms and hurricane can cause flood waters to carry agricultural runoff into Lake Okeechobee, or other algae filled bodies of water, stimulating the blooms further.

U.S. Rep. Brian Mast, R-Fla., proposed lowering Lake Okeechobee water levels earlier this year to lessen the harmful discharges of toxic algae blooms during the summer rainy season. The proposal was controversial for the dangers it posed in the event of a possible drought.

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