John A. Kitzhaber, MD, Governor

Oregon Health Authority

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News release

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Health advisory issued for Fern Ridge Reservoir

High algae levels found at Fern Ridge Reservoir in Lane County

A health advisory is being issued today due to high levels of blue-green algae in Fern Ridge Reservoir, located approximately 12 miles west of Eugene in Lane County.

Water monitoring has confirmed the presence of blue-green algae that can produce toxins. These algae levels are likely to be associated with dangerous cyanotoxin concentrations in the water that can be harmful to humans and animals. Swallowing or inhaling water droplets should be avoided, as well as skin contact with water.

Drinking water directly from Fern Ridge Reservoir is especially dangerous. Oregon Public Health officials advise campers and other Fern Ridge Reservoir visitors that toxins cannot be removed by boiling, filtering or treating the water with camping-style filters.

People who draw in-home water directly from Fern Ridge Reservoir are advised to use an alternative water source because private treatment systems are not proven effective in removing algae toxins. However, public drinking water systems can reduce algae toxins through proper filtration and disinfection. If people on public water systems have questions about treatment and testing, they should contact their water supplier.

Oregon health officials recommend that people who choose to eat fish from waters where algae blooms are present should remove all fat, skin and organs before cooking, because toxins are more likely to collect in these tissues. Public health officials also advise that people should not eat freshwater clams or mussels from Fern Ridge Reservoir. Crayfish muscle can be eaten, but internal organs and liquid fat should be discarded.
(more)

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.

The public will be advised when the concern no longer exists.

With proper precautions to avoid water contact, people are encouraged to visit Fern Ridge Reservoir and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, fishing and bird watching. Boating is safe as long as speeds do not create excessive water spray, which could lead to inhalation risk.

For local information contact the Lane County Parks Department at 541-682-2000.

For health information, contact the Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance (HABS) program at 971-673-0400 or www.healthoregon.org/hab.

The HABS program maintains a current list of all health advisories on its website. To find out if an advisory has been issued or lifted for a specific water body, visit www.healthoregon.org/hab and select "Check current water conditions." You can also contact the Oregon Public Health Division toll-free information line at 1-877-290-6767.

The Harmful Algae Bloom Surveillance program is funded through September 2013 by a grant from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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