

## Algae growth forces waterway to close

Huras, Adam. [Daily Gleaner](#) [Fredericton, N.B.] 03 Aug 2010: A.5.

MONCTON - Call it the summer of sludge.

A hot and hazy summer mixed with the odd day of intense rain now has some New Brunswick lakes turning slime green with blue-green algae.

"You get warm weather, relatively calm conditions and it comes to the surface quite visibly," said Alyre Chiasson, a biology professor at l'Universite de Moncton.

"There are treatment options out there and at the moment we are working in collaboration with the Department of Environment on what can be done.

"There are options that are out there, but whether they can be done or not will be a decision that takes the Clean Water Act into account."

Moncton's Irishtown Nature Park Lake has once again closed its popular canoe and kayak waterway to boating, swimming and fishing due to an overwhelming algae bloom.

The lake within New Brunswick's largest urban park was plagued with blue-green algal growth in August 2009, turning its waters from a brownish tinge to vivid green.

Lake Utopia in southern Charlotte County has been affected by the green gunk, while New Brunswick environmental groups have reported spotting the blue-green algae in some of the province's rivers.

Quebec has issued warnings of severe infestations this year. Manitoba and Nova Scotia also have battled algal scum, while Saskatchewan and Alberta have had lakes with high levels of cyanobacteria due to farm runoff.

The technicolour growths of algae are caused by contaminants leaching into lakes in the form of fertilizers from urban lawns and farm fields, faulty septic systems and soil erosion.

The algae produce toxins that can kill aquatic life and other creatures in the lakes.

"The long-term goal, if you are talking provincially, is best management practices on the land," Chiasson said. "By far the best solution is to stop excessive nutrients from getting into the system in the first place."

But in the interim, the province is considering treatment options to keep waterways open.

Chiasson said there are several varieties of management to be considered which span from an ultrasound treatment that ruptures blue-green algae cells to one that uses the straw from oats to kill algae bacteria.

"The straw gets colonized by bacteria and that then produces a toxin that kills the blue-green algae," Chiasson said.

Other options include a clay product that removes phosphates or the creation of floating islands of vegetation where the plants absorb excess nutrients.

"Behind all of this the ideal solution is to eliminate the input of nutrients and that remains the ultimate goal through this whole exercise," Chiasson said. "You can treat and deal with the immediate problem, but that doesn't make the problem go away if there is a continual input of phosphate."

A recent study conducted by the Royal Bank and Unilever found 83 per cent of Canadians are concerned about the quality of water in lakes where they swim, and more than two-thirds think the water is getting worse.

"Blue-green algae can create toxins that are harmful to health," said Dr. Denis Allard, a Department of Health medical officer. "It can be serious where skin can start to itch or burn.

"Effects to the liver and neurological system do not occur as quickly, but that would depend on a person drinking the water."

The Department of Environment has asked for the data that has been collected by Chiasson on the algae growths in Moncton's Irishtown Nature Park Lake.

"They are looking at the situation but on a larger scale, not just Irishtown, but a provincial strategy to control and prevent blue-green algae outbreaks in the province," Chiasson said.

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