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Sept. 18, 2008

Public health advisory issued for Dexter Reservoir

A health advisory prompted by high algae levels found in Dexter Reservoir, near Lowell, Ore., was issued today by the Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Lane County Health Department.

Water sampling has confirmed the presence of blue-green algae in concentrations which can produce toxins harmful to humans and animals. These levels can be associated with dangerous toxin concentrations in the water, according to World Health Organization guidelines. Swallowing or inhaling water droplets should be avoided, as well as skin contact with water by humans or animals. The toxins cannot be removed by individuals such as campers, who boil, filter or treat water on their own. Public water systems, however, have ways to successfully treat algae contamination.

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

Exposure to toxins can produce symptoms of numbness, tingling and dizziness which 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 Dexter Reservoir and enjoy activities such as camping, hiking, biking, picnicking, and bird watching.

For local information, contact the Corps' Willamette Valley Project park rangers at (541) 942-5631. For health information, contact Ken Kauffman, DHS Environmental Health Specialist, at (971) 673-0435. Additional information on blue-green algae can be found on the DHS Web site at <http://oregon.gov/DHS/ph/envtox/maadvisories.shtml>.

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