

Damn that algae - it's a blooming nuisance

SOURCE: Sydney Morning Herald Newspaper
Alexandra Smith
September 28, 2007

A BLUE-GREEN algal bloom has taken over most of Warragamba Dam, with small levels of toxins found just below the surface.

Recent testing of the algae had shown three positive samples of microcystins, toxins that can cause skin irritation and stomach upsets if consumed in large doses.
But NSW Health has stressed that the quality of Sydney's drinking water is not under threat.

Kerry Chant, the acting NSW chief health officer, said the levels of toxins were very low and had been found about three metres below the surface, not from where drinking water was being sourced.

The Water Minister, Phil Koperberg, said the bloom now stretched across 75 per cent of the dam - more than 58 kilometres - and more than twice the area it occupied at the beginning of the month.

He said it was possible drinking water could be mildly affected, but this would be limited, with water being safely drawn from 48 metres below the algae.

"There could be a discernible odour or taste with the water in the coming months," he said.

Warmer weather had provided the perfect conditions for the bloom to grow and could be present until at least Christmas.

"It is a bloom which, due to the warm weather, is likely to persist," Mr Koperberg said.

"It is very unlikely, unless there is some unforeseen meteorological event, that this bloom will either dissipate or disappear during the summer. It's, more likely than not, going to be around at Christmas."

Mr Koperberg said he would be provided with updates on water quality and testing.

"Testing is being conducted regularly by the Sydney Catchment Authority and Sydney Water of both the raw and treated water before it is supplied to Sydneysiders to drink," Mr Koperberg said.

"It is not a health risk whatsoever, even though part of the rigorous testing that Sydney Water and Health undertake has detected some microsystems - which are a group of molecules which contain some toxicity.

"Those levels are well below the Australian standards for drinking water safety.

"The main issue with this bloom is its visibility."

EDITORS COMMENT: Since when has ANY toxins been good for our drinking water let alone the human body for consumption, these latest reports are again the government spinning bad news for Sydney people, reminds me of the HIH Insurance scandal when the government also said there was nothing to worry about, and we all know how that ended. Any toxins that cause skin irritations and upset stomachs that is found in drinking water is INDEED something to worry about.