

Blue-Green Algae

Despite their name, blue-green algae are actually types of bacteria known as Cyanobacteria. Its nickname is a result of the organism's colour, structure and aquatic-dwelling nature.

Blue-green algae are present in both fresh and saltwater, and are an important part of a healthy ecosystem. In normal conditions, they exist in low numbers with no impact on the environment. However, under certain conditions the algae can grow very rapidly causing an 'algal bloom'.



What causes an algal bloom?

Algal growth can be attributed to a range of conditions including:

- an increase in nutrients including nitrogen and phosphorus
- sunlight
- increased water temperature
- water becoming stagnant or turbulence being minimal.

Why are blue-green algae a problem?

The algae can spoil water quality when present in large numbers by releasing various toxins. The toxins released can produce a potential health risk to fish, birdlife, and humans. In bloom situations the algae uses the sunlight, nutrients and dissolved oxygen in the water to bloom. Algal blooms also discolour the water and create an unsightly and sometimes smelly scum on the surface near the shoreline.

What can be done?

As a community we can assist in the prevention of blue-green algae blooms by limiting the amount of nutrients in the water. Detergents and fertilisers have a high

concentration of nitrogen and phosphorus, which provides the algae with an excellent food source. To help reduce the frequency and intensity of blooms Council recommends the following:

- washing your car on the lawn rather than on the road or driveway
- using detergents which contain no phosphorus
- reducing the use of fertilisers where possible
- reducing erosion of land to prevent soil washing into waterways
- responsibly disposing of green waste including lawn clippings and weeds
- properly disposing of dog droppings into Council landfill.

Council does not take action to directly treat blue-green algae blooms, as chemical treatments may seriously affect the overall health of the ecosystem and may kill fish and birds. Additionally, the algae have the potential to become toxic once disturbed or killed.

Further Information

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