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Blue-green algae makes early appearance

Residents across NSW are being asked to keep an eye out for blue-green algae as the weather warms and to report any suspected blooms, NSW Water Commissioner, David Harriss, said.

“There have already been a number of blue-green algal blooms due to unseasonably hot weather, sporadic rainfall and low flows in some rivers and streams,” Mr Harriss said.

“Individuals and families should be aware of any current algal alerts before swimming in lakes, dams, rivers and at the beach.

“I would also encourage people to learn the basics of how to identify an algal bloom and who to alert if they notice a bloom in a local waterway.”

Mr Harriss said that algal cells are a natural part of aquatic ecosystems that are always present in the water - usually in small, harmless numbers.

“These cells can multiply and grow, or ‘bloom’ when there is the right combination of environmental conditions, including high nutrient levels, warm water temperatures, sunlight and still water.”

Algae scums are most often blue-green or green, but can also be white, brown, blue, yellow-brown or red.

In late 2012 several of Sydney’s beaches were closed due to a bloom, identified as *Noctiluca scintillans* which appears as a pinkish to reddish discolouration in water with a similar characteristic to fairy floss.

This bloom had likely occurred as a result of the upwelling of nutrient rich deep ocean water onto the continental shelf, but can also often be seen after rainfall events in the vicinity of river mouths.

“Even when going to the beach, swimmers should be vigilant as marine algae may cause skin, eye and ear irritations,” Mr Harriss said.

“The Office of Water, in conjunction with other state agencies, local councils and community volunteers, conduct routine monitoring of water quality in the state’s major dams and rivers.

“When algae are detected at dangerous levels the Office of Water will issue a warning on behalf of the Regional Algal Coordinating Committee through the local media.”

Information updates about the status of blue-green algae are available on the NSW Office of Water website - www.water.nsw.gov.au or freecall Algal Information Hotline on **1800 999 457**.

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