



c/o Fraser Basin Council
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Courtney Zimmerman
Corporate Director, Environmental Public Health
Interior Health
Sent by e-mail to courtney.zimmerman@interiorhealth.ca

17 January 2023

Re: Interior Health process for Cautionary Advisory notices during algal blooms

Dear Ms. Zimmerman,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC), the City of Salmon Arm, the Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), and the District of Sicamous to make you aware of the frustration that we, along with residents of Salmon Arm, experienced last summer during a prolonged algal bloom that impacted the Salmon Arm Bay area of Shuswap Lake.

A suspected algal bloom first appeared in the bay in June. Interior Health responded by requesting that water samples be collected for microcystin analysis, and requesting that City of Salmon Arm staff and CSRD staff post Cautionary Advisory Notices at the Salmon Arm wharf and at Sunnybrae Community Park, respectively. While the response from Interior Health was swift, we are concerned that the advisory was recommended without first receiving results from the water samples. Furthermore, the advisory was posted just before the Canada Day long weekend, and IH staff were not available to respond to inquiries from the public about the advisory.

An algal bloom appeared in Salmon Arm Bay in early August, and a similar response from IH and local governments followed with IH recommending that Cautionary Advisory notices be posted at affected sites and that water samples continue to be collected on a regular basis. Thankfully, all water samples collected throughout the algal bloom were clear of microcystin. However, the advisory caused some confusion among residents and visitors recreating on the lake. Queries about the location of the algal bloom and the safety of the water for drinking and recreation were addressed to SWC, City of Salmon Arm, and CSRD staff who in turn re-directed the questions to IH. Unfortunately, IH staff were not available outside of regular working hours to respond to queries from either the general public or local governments who receive the majority of queries from the public.

We have the following suggestions for monitoring and communicating to the public about algal blooms:

- Interior Health should be the lead agency for monitoring algal blooms if there is a potential health risk. This includes the collection and analysis of water samples from affected sites, and posting advisories based on the results of water tests.



- IH should be the lead agency for communicating to the public about algal blooms. There is a great demand for this information, and several platforms should be considered including websites, social media, and news media. The SWC, the City of Salmon Arm, the CSRD and the District of Sicamous can amplify these communiques through their social media platforms to help increase the reach.
- Advisory notices should state the location of the algal bloom as precisely as possible, and be updated regularly to reflect changing conditions.
- IH staff should be available to respond to inquiries about algal bloom advisories. Having a staff person on-call on weekends would be very beneficial for providing clarifying information about advisories.

We are very appreciative of the partnership we have with Interior Health. Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions.

Sincerely,

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About the Shuswap Watershed Council

The Shuswap Watershed Council (SWC) was established in 2014 as a watershed-based partnership of several organizations with an interest in or responsibility for protecting water quality. There are up to 22 members that represent three regional districts, two municipalities, the Secwepemc Nation, three provincial government agencies, and Shuswap communities. The SWC is a collaborative, non-regulatory group that focuses on strategic initiatives to protect, maintain, and enhance water quality and promote safe recreation in the Shuswap. The SWC works alongside organizations that have regulatory roles in managing the Shuswap watershed, complementing their work and carefully avoiding duplication.