

FAQ – TOXIC ALGAE

Information from Lake Lawrence LMD Meeting 3/23/2022

1. **When does Environmental Health start Algae Testing? When do you end Algae testing for the year?**
 - Thurston County Environmental Health (TCEH) conducts sampling for cyanobacteria (also known as blue-green algae) on a volunteer notification basis. Samples are sent to King County laboratory. Due to limited funding King County accepts samples mainly from late April/early May till November each year. This also lines up with the majority of lake use with warmer temperatures.
2. **How frequently are these tests done?**
 - Samples are collected when surface scum is present, No more than one sample per week, however one sample can include water from several different locations on the lake.
3. **How do you report algae (link/website/etc.)?**
 - Email at enhealth@co.thurston.wa.us or call 360.867.2626 (general line) or Sarah.Ashworth@co.thurston.wa.us 360.490.0474 (my cell, I'm often in the field but will respond as soon as possible).
4. **How do lake residents sign up to receive algae testing results?**
 - <https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/FtcpYnn/algaeadvisory>
 - Current advisories can be found here:
<https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/Pages/algae-advisories.aspx>
5. **What is the best link to see past and present test results?**
 - <https://www.nwtoxicalgae.org/>
6. **How are WARNINGS posted, where, by who, how long do they stay up, is it safe to get in the water even if posted, etc.?**
 - WARNING signs are posted in response to a sample result above the Washington State Advisory Level for cyanobacteria.
 - Advisories stay in place until two weeks of consecutive sample results are below advisory levels. Signs would be taken down when the advisory ends.
 - TCEH posts them at public access points (i.e., Public boat launches) and sends out an email alert to lake community members.
 - With volunteer help, we hope to get signs posted at other community access points to minimize interaction with the water when public health is at risk. We will send out an email to volunteers when results indicate the need for signage, and then when the signs should be taken down. For best public response, we will need to make sure signs only stay up with needed, or people tend to become 'sign blind'.
 - While an algae bloom is occurring, we recommend avoiding contact with the scum layer.

7. What other types of testing does Environmental Health do, when, how frequently, why, where on the lake, and where can the test results be seen (link info), etc.?

- Our lake sampling season is conducted from May-Oct. We sample 10 lakes throughout Thurston County, and cover 13 sampling sites across these lakes. This, along with stream sampling, is an ongoing project to monitor local water quality.
- We sample at the deepest location in each basin of Lake Lawrence, collecting profile data on water quality parameters including temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH and conductivity. We also collect samples at the surface and bottom for phosphorus and nitrogen, and a composite sample to look at chlorophyll.
- The data is published yearly in a lake report, previous reports can be found here: <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/phss/Pages/wq-monitor-reports.aspx>
- Due to COVID/staffing issues, we are behind on reporting but plan to have an updated report out next month.

8. How soon after testing are the results posted to the link/website - for both algae testing and other testing?

- Algae results are sent out via email alert as soon as they are received from King County (usually within a few days of sample collection). They can also be viewed on the NW Toxic Algae website and our county website if an advisory has been issued.
- Our lake monitoring results are available upon request and are published yearly.

9. Where does the algae come from?

- Multifaceted issue – generally aquatic algae and plant growth is a result of high levels of nutrients in the lake water (along with light and temperature). Algae doesn't equal cyanobacteria/toxic necessarily, many species of algae and few can be toxic.

10. What are some things we can do to help reduce algae?

- Reducing nutrients (especially phosphorous) is key.
 - Maintain septic systems
 - Minimize fertilizer use – **Because of known algae issue on Lake Lawrence our LMD Steering Committee recommends no fertilizer use within 200' of shoreline**
 - Manage pet waste – dogs in particular
 - Cover any manure piles
 - Do not feed/encourage wildlife
 - Geese – mainly something to work with USDA wildlife service program regarding, but they can be discouraged by planting a 6-8 ft hedge (low shrubs to not block lake view)
 - LMD can look into alum treatment to help with benthic phosphorus

11. How can we best help you?

- Active involvement with the community, including outreach and education to continue practices that limit nutrient loading.

- Alerts to when algae is present – seeing as the program is a response based vs. active monitoring.

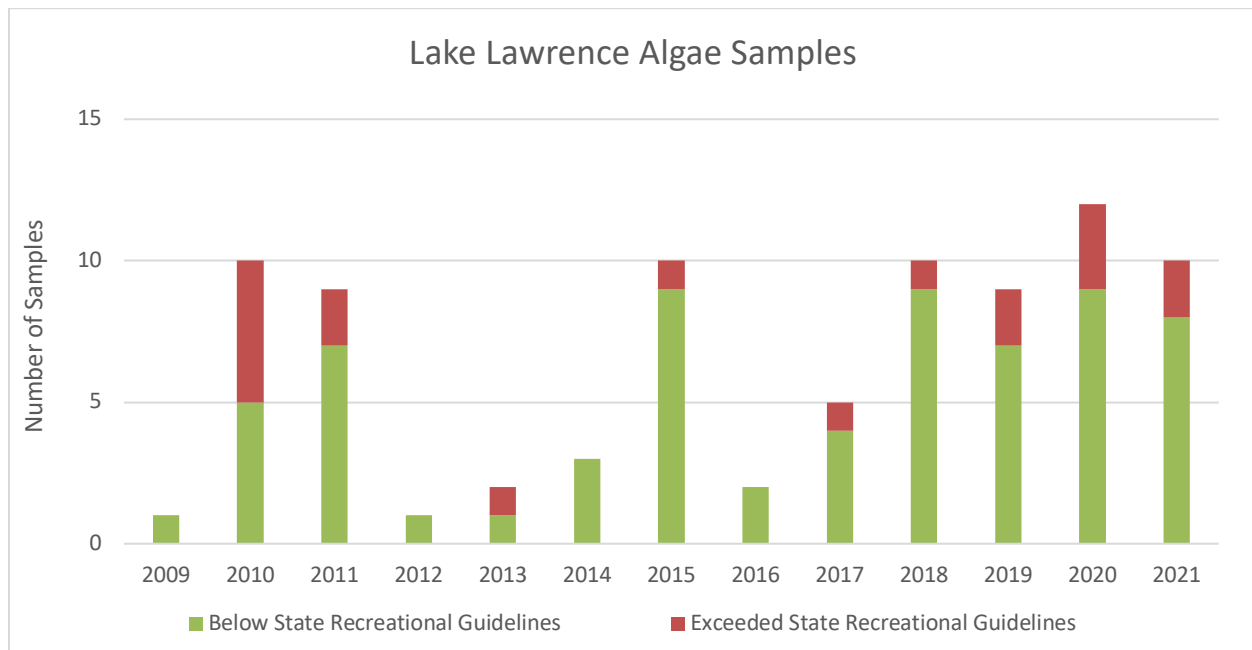


Figure 3. Lake Lawrence algae bloom samples 2009 to 2021.

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