

# Two more state parks placed on algae warning list

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By **Spencer Hunt**

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Warning signs are being posted at two more state parks, including one along Lake Erie, as blue-green algae continue to appear in more lakes across Ohio.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources is to post warnings at the 2,650-acre lake at West Branch State Park near Ravenna in Portage County after an algae bloom was noticed there today. Also today, warning signs were posted along a 1,500-foot Lake Erie beach at East Harbor State Park in Ottawa County.



U.S. EPA  
East Harbor State Park

That brings to eight the number of state parks where officials are testing water for health-threatening liver and nerve toxins. The East Harbor warnings urge visitors to "minimize contact" with the lake water and avoid swallowing it.

Massive blooms of blue-green algae have for years been a growing problem in Lake Erie's shallow western basin, where researchers have been monitoring them.

However, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Natural Resources say they think this is the first time they've investigated toxic algae at any of the state's Lake Erie beaches.

"We weren't looking for it," said Dina Pierce, an Ohio EPA spokeswoman. "Last year was the first time we really had to deal with" the algae.

Cyanobacteria, more commonly called blue-green algae, first appeared as a problem last year when U.S. EPA tests of water taken from Grand Lake St. Marys in western Ohio revealed microcystin, an algae-produced liver toxin.

Microcystin has at times grown so concentrated at Grand Lake that the state now warns visitors not to touch the water, take out boats or eat any fish caught there. The state is investigating 13 cases in which people reported illnesses that might be linked to contaminated Grand Lake water.

Other sightings of blue-green algae across Ohio this summer have led officials to post warnings around lakes at Burr Oak, Blue Rock, Dillon and Lake Hope state parks and at a golf-course pond at Shawnee State Park.

Blue Rock visitors are warned not to go boating or touch the water on Cutler Lake. The other four parks are warning people to minimize contact, steer clear of algae scum and avoid swallowing lake or pond water. The warnings could be lifted or scaled back if two weeks of tests do not find any poisons.

Blue-green algae are common in Ohio's lakes and streams. Storms that wash manure, fertilizers and raw sewage into lakes help them grow thick in water. They can produce as many as four different liver and nerve toxins.

Pierce said the algae at East Harbor are likely part of a larger bloom that has been spreading across Erie's western basin this summer.

Heidi Hetzel-Evans, an Ohio Department of Natural Resources spokeswoman, said park workers have been instructed this year to report any suspected blooms of algae so that water can be tested.

Pierce said water samples were taken from East Harbor on Tuesday. Hetzel-Evans said samples were taken at West Branch today.

All of the parks remain open to visitors, but fears of toxic algae have caused a big drop in tourism business at Grand Lake and campground cancellations at other parks.

The warnings are necessary, even if tests don't reveal harmful concentrations of toxins, Hetzel-Evans said. "Safeguarding the health of our visitors is our top priority."