



State Joint Information News Clips

Tuesday, August 5, 2014



Forecast Outlook

A few showers this morning and a returning chance this afternoon.

Virtually no wind this morning and incredibly muggy conditions early. High temperatures will rise into the lower 80s this afternoon with mostly cloudy skies for the majority of the day.

Tonight, temperatures drop into the lower 60s with the humidity sticking around. A few isolated showers lead into Wednesday.

Highs on Wednesday in the lower 80s with afternoon sunshine.

Looking warm and dry into the end of the work week..

Today's Forecast

81°

62°

TUESDAY: A few rain showers. PM thundershowers, humid. Highs low 80s.

TONIGHT: Mainly dry, muggy. Early fog possible. Lows low 60s.

WEDNESDAY: A few passing showers early, otherwise dry. PM Sunshine. Highs around 80.

Toledo seeks return to normalcy after do not drink water advisory lifted

BY TOM HENRY BLADE - STAFF WRITER

August 5, 2014

Take a deep breath, Toledo.

The return to normalcy has begun.

The metro area's 500,000 residents on Monday welcomed the return of tap water that public officials — for the first time in three days — declared with utmost confidence was clean, safe, and so free of the sickening western Lake Erie algae toxin called microcystin that sophisticated laboratory instruments can now barely detect it.

Drink up, an elated and exhausted Mayor D. Michael Collins encouraged the region's water customers. But while the transition back to normalcy appeared to be going smooth — with no major water main breaks or other complications reported, to the delight of utility operators and public health officials who feared a setback if all homes and businesses tried flushing out their pipes at once — there also was a sense that things will never be the same.

The day began with Mr. Collins lashing out at state and federal officials for more rhetoric than action over the years.

“Our government has to come to the realization it's time to stop talking about western Lake Erie and do something about it,” he fumed. “I'd like them to stop acting like feral cats trying to organize a parade.”

[Full Toledo Water Crisis coverage](#)

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Connie Elter, left, and Dawn Szych, right, play with Myah Brown, center, 11 months, Szych's granddaughter, in a small pool at Szych's home in North Toledo Monday. Over the weekend, Brown received bottled water baths and today they decided to celebrate the clean water announcement Monday in the pool.

THE BLADE/ISAAC HALE

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If there is a “silver lining” to this ordeal, several local officials said throughout the day, it will be more than the obvious heightened awareness of contaminated drinking water and the hidden costs of pollution. It starts with a consensus among state and local officials over how to test for the toxin, and how to make better sense of the laboratory data.

Incredibly, that consensus wasn’t forged until about 4 p.m. Sunday. Also, according to Toledo Councilman Lindsey Webb, that consensus will have ramifications from this point forward for other western Lake Erie shoreline communities in Ohio such as Oregon, Port Clinton, Marblehead, and Sandusky.

The ordeal gave Toledo, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency a firsthand look at how a mishmash of testing methods and a lack of certainty over steps to be taken, even when drawing samples, can leave communities in limbo when a water crisis hits. “Before this started, there was not a [standard] way of testing for this toxin,” Ms. Webb said.

On Saturday, the first day of the ordeal, dozens of officials from public health, environment, emergency response, and other disciplines were frustrated with apples-to-oranges comparisons after realizing tests were done differently at Toledo’s Collins Park Water Treatment Plant, the city of Oregon’s water treatment plant, Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., the Ohio EPA’s laboratory in Reynoldsburg, Ohio, and the U.S. EPA’s laboratory in Cincinnati.

Officials couldn’t agree which test was the best indicator for the toxin’s presence. That’s something area water plant operators have wanted sorted out by the U.S. EPA, but the federal agency claims it has not finished researching the science behind each detection method.

Don Moline, Toledo’s public utilities commissioner, described them as “significant variations.”

So Toledo and state officials took it upon themselves on Sunday to come up with a consensus for moving forward, according to Ms. Webb, who was part of the discussions.

A copy of the new testing protocol, signed by Mr. Collins and Ohio EPA Director Craig Butler, appears on [page 41 of a 72-page interim report](#) about the water crisis that was presented to the City Council on Monday afternoon.

Among the many stipulations are two changes that Ms. Webb said are particularly important.

Samples must have chemicals added to neutralize chlorine, so that chlorine is not breaking down any microcystin that might be in each sample before it reaches the lab. Also, each sample will need a process called lysing.

Lysing is a laboratory procedure of getting cocoonlike algae cells to break open and release any tiny, pea-shaped toxins they may have inside. It can be done by simply exposing samples to a hard freeze-and-thaw cycle, or by adding a chemical to stimulate that reaction.

Great Lakes scientists know microcystin, the chief toxin in microcystis algae, is not uniformly spread in algae blooms.

It's entirely possible to have a large outbreak of microcystis algae and little or no toxin. Or, conversely, more toxin than would be expected in a relatively faint bloom.

Chemists inside Toledo's Collins Park Water Treatment Plant have preferred the lysing technique because they believe it gives them a more precise account of how much toxin actually exists in each sample, Jeff Martin, a senior chemist at the plant, has said.

But other labs, such as the main one operated by the Ohio EPA lab, opt not to use lysing. There has been some debate among experts about whether lysing creates a false positive.

Ms. Webb noted that data presented to Toledo city councilmen Monday afternoon showed the opposite of what would be expected if that were true: Several of the unlysed samples actually came back with higher readings for microcystin than those that were lysed.

She said that shows lysing does not create a false positive and that Toledo's problem was the result of toxins concentrating around its water intake.

"This groundwork will lay the foundation for a national testing standard," Ms. Webb said.

Oregon, which has a nearby intake, a mile closer to shore, does not use lysing in its samples.

The ordeal will prompt Toledo officials to re-examine the physical capabilities of its Collins Park Water Treatment Plant, the depth of its intake, and other issues, said Ed Moore, a veteran city administrator who took over as director of the city's public utilities department in April.

"This was as unprecedented as it gets. This was D-Day for the Department of Public Utilities," he said. "It was absolutely a ground-breaking weekend. Unfortunately, it took a disaster to get us to that point." The plant was built in 1941, a relic of former President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal-era Public Works Administration.

Although engineers who work there stand behind its design, city councilmen largely ignored requests for improvements until the roof nearly collapsed in one section, resulting in a \$300 million upgrade that began two years ago.

As a result, the plant now has more construction workers on site than plant employees, Mr. Moore told reporters during the morning news conference.

During his presentation to the the council that afternoon, Mr. Moore was asked for a ballpark estimate of replacing that water treatment plant in today's dollars.

"North of \$1 billion," he said.

Staggering as that sounds, though, the city might want to consider setting aside funds in the coming years and plan for an eventual replacement, Mr. Moore said.

"If we'd started doing that 20 years ago, we'd be a lot farther ahead today," he said.

But none of that, according to Mr. Moore, means anything when weak state and federal environmental laws allow Lake Erie to become so fouled by algae.

"I don't care if the plant's 2 years old or 200 years old," he said. "If the source [of water] is corrupted, there's nothing you can do about it."

Mr. Collins and others said they expect the hidden costs of last weekend's water crisis to be astronomical. George Sarantou, the city's finance director, said he estimated the ordeal cost the city alone \$130,000 in additional operational costs, including \$28,000 for police department overtime. Losses among private businesses extended well beyond that.

"The infrastructure of the city is never sexy to talk about until there is a tragedy," Mr. Sarantou said. Many people seem to forget western Lake Erie has been fouled by toxic microcystis algae almost annually since 1995. The blooms have generally become more intense since 2003, a possible symptom of climate change.

The one exception was 2012, when this region and others went bone dry from the worst drought in a half-century. That 2012 anomaly, though, came between a record 2011 algae bloom and the 2013 outbreak, considered the second worst in modern times.

To Great Lakes researchers such as Jeff Reutter, Ohio Sea Grant and Ohio State University Stone Laboratory director, the trend is even more difficult to reverse as climate change becomes more acute and population increases result in more shoreline development and a demand for food.

Agricultural runoff is one of the largest contributors of phosphorus. The Ohio Phosphorus Task Force has called for farmers to reduce phosphorus releases from their land by 40 percent through a series of voluntary conservation techniques. Mr. Reutter has said even a 40 percent reduction in nutrient loadings may not be enough, given internal loads and how climate change is accentuating the problem.

Farm groups continue to promote conservative techniques. One of the latest is a voluntary certification program to help Ohio crop farmers document efforts they make to control runoff.

But many people insist more needs to be done and point to the weekend's water crisis as a prime example of why.



Attorney General sending investigators to monitor possible price gouging

Posted: Aug 04, 2014

TOLEDO, OH (Toledo News Now) - Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine says his office is actively monitoring possible price gouging complaints regarding bottled water as a result of Toledo's water crisis.

Additional Links

"We have seen the best of many Ohioans who have generously helped those needing water in the Toledo area, but we also have heard allegations of possible price gouging in the area," Attorney General DeWine said. "We are actively monitoring complaints related to the Toledo water crisis. Those who think they are overpaying for water should contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office immediately and provide information about where the water was being sold and the price paid."



The Ohio Attorney General's Office is sending representatives to monitor water prices in the Toledo area.

Laws that address price gouging vary from state to state. While Ohio does not have a statute that deals directly with price gouging, state law bans unconscionable sales practices.



City of Toledo releases preliminary report on water crisis

Posted: Aug 04, 2014 7:52 PM EDT Updated: Aug 04, 2014 11:34 PM EDT
Posted by Holly Tuey

TOLEDO, OH (Toledo News Now) -

Following the lifting of a water usage ban for the Toledo area, the Toledo Department of Public Utilities presented a 73-page preliminary report to the City of Toledo on the issue.

City leaders say an algal bloom right at the water intake site on Lake Erie caused a spike in toxin levels, which was noticed Friday at the Collins Water Park Treatment Plant.

According to the report, chemists at the treatment plant found a "lysed sample reading of 0.6 for microcystins" early Friday evening.



It wasn't until 1:30 Saturday morning that the City of Toledo sent out a water usage advisory to the public.

Chemical adjustments were made immediately and continuously at the plant in an attempt to bring the numbers down.

Getting other agencies involved

City officials notified the Ohio EPA of those first readings, who then got involved in the testing process. The report shows that from the onset of the testing, chemists found inconsistencies in the data.

In an attempt to verify the results, the Toledo Department of Public Utilities began a three-day effort to enlist independent analysis – first within their sister water treatment plant in Oregon, and then with samples sent to Lake Superior State University, the Ohio EPA in Columbus and the US EPA in Cincinnati.

[Click here to view the entire report.](#)

The report includes the raw data from all of the agencies that conducted testing. The Department of Public Utilities says this crisis was "a learning experience for all involved."

Inconsistencies exist in the data due to conflicting parameters for sampling and analyzing the microcystin levels. This resulted in the establishment of a set of protocols for procuring consistent sampling that will be used as a model statewide.

"We changed our testing, and that's something that the City of Toledo, along with Ohio EPA and the US EPA worked very hard on," said Toledo Public Utilities Director Edward Moore. "We felt this was a great progress."

Toledo Mayor D. Michael Collins says that although many residents were demanding test results throughout the weekend, the city did not release that information until Monday because there was no consistency in the results due to the inconsistency in the tests. He says until they got to a point where they were getting consistent results, he wasn't going to make them public.

According to the report, the US EPA found toxin levels to be less than 0.32 ppb (parts per billion). The Ohio EPA conducted 70 tests on Saturday, and the highest result was 0.85 ppb. Collins says the City of Toledo, however, found results in two neighborhoods - east Toledo and Point Place - that were at least 1 ppb.

Treating the problem

Officials say this is just the beginning, and they need to come up with a plan on how to prevent something like this from happening again.

"We are going to have to talk about that question on a very high level, and hopefully we can get the United States, the federal government involved, the state government involved," Moore said.

Mayor Collins says it will require getting to the root of the problem: the algae in Lake Erie. Algae is not a new issue, but rather an ongoing problem that has long had the potential to compromise the water supply. He says the issue is much bigger than just the Collins Water Park Treatment Plant or Toledo itself.

"We are going to have to have a realistic approach to this through the federal government and state partners," Collins said. "We must address the algae bloom problem. If you take the algae bloom out of the issue, you don't have an issue. Therefore, all the issues in a water treatment plant are not the sole solution to the problem when the body of water you get your drinking water from has been totally compromised, and it's all part of nature and irresponsible stewardship of the environment."

The farming factor

Local leaders believe farm [runoff may be contributing to the algae problem](#). Farmers have not been forced to cut back on the amount of fertilizer they use, but they are aware of the issue.

"If we put on too much fertilizer and we lost it and it goes into the water, well, it's a loss for us, too," said farmer Keith Van Horn. "It's our job to preserve the ground. Preserved ground actually produces more."

The cost of chemical fertilizers has sky-rocketed, so many farms are starting to steer away from their use for that reason, as well.

Looking ahead

Following the water crisis, the Ohio EPA and the City of Toledo say they will sample the water for microcystins daily, with analysis twice per week for the next month in an attempt to continue monitoring this situation.

August and September is often the peak time for algal blooms. The local treatment plants deal with algae in source water every year, it will just be a matter of vigilance and proactive treatment to keep the water safe.

Distribution centers offer free relief

Community continues to search for water, other beverages

BY MARISSA MEDANSKY AND MATT THOMPSON
BLADE STAFF WRITER

Deborah Adams biked downtown through the summer heat, arriving at the old Macomber building to grab a free case of water bottles from outside.

"I'm a diabetic," explained Ms. Adams, 56. "I need that water."

She's grateful for the donation, of course. But the water is hard to carry without a car. One volunteer helped Ms. Adams affix the crate to her bicycle before she pedaled home.

Toledoans like Ms. Adams flocked to distribution centers on Sunday to collect free crates of water and other beverages. Some had cars, but many came without vehicles and had to haul the heavy boxes themselves. Others used grocery carts, children's strollers, and even the platforms of motorized scooters as makeshift devices to transport the water.



Dan Rogers, right, president and CEO of Cherry Street Mission Ministries, helps organize the free water distribution area at the former Macomber High School on Sunday, the second day of a water emergency.
THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT

DISTRIBUTION CENTERS: [List of places to find drinkable water](#)

VIDEO: [Toledo-area water crisis](#)

PHOTO GALLERIES:

- [Kasich, Collins comment as Toledo water crisis continues](#)
- [Toledoans still scurrying for water supplies](#)
- [Algae at Toledo water intake crib](#)
- [Oregon water treatment facility](#)

The water at the Macomber building came from a local disaster relief nonprofit, said Ken Leslie, the founder of the homelessness awareness group 1Matters, as he orchestrated a group of volunteers from local missions, shelters, and churches. Some of the donations went downtown for public distribution, while others were delivered to shelters and other service organizations, many of which cooperated with one another to get the donations in on time.

"That's what so cool, is the shelters helping each other," Mr. Leslie said.

By 9:45 a.m., the line for water wrapped around the building, with cars spanning blocks down the street. Toledoan Michael Fears, 55, and his daughter waited for water for their family, including special "pet water" for Daichi, the family's four-year-old Great Dane.

Mr. Fears said Daichi used to drink his fill from the bathtub, but that's no longer possible. After the family cat drank water from the toilet, she spent the morning vomiting.

“I hope this ends quickly, because we’re spending money on water we don’t need to spend,” Mr. Fears said.



Staff Sgt. Josh Reiss, left, and Staff Sgt. Brock Mowry of the 200th Red Horse Engineers fill a cooler from a ‘water buffalo’ with water purified by the Air Force.

THE BLADE/AMY E. VOIGT

At Woodward High School, the National Guard’s 200th Red Horse Squadron arrived to distribute water in the parking lot. There, too, the queue for water contained dozens of cars. Volunteers estimated that their site, one of three Toledo locations where the National Guard was present, had served well over 1,000 people before noon.

“Once the bags and the bottles started coming, it started getting busy,” said volunteer Denny Whaley, 39, who works at the high school.

In Michigan, several filling stations provided Monroe County residents with drinking water. Kim Comerzan, a health official for the county, said she anticipates the stations will operate today if Toledo’s drinking-water ban continues.

Perrysburg Mayor Mike Olmstead was greeting residents all afternoon at Perrysburg High School's baseball fields as they brought bottles and coolers to fill with water.

“We’ve had a steady 15-20 cars in the lot continuously since we opened at about 12:45 p.m.,” Mayor Olmstead said Sunday at about 5 p.m. “We’re not running out and we have adequate water for fire suppression too.”

Tanya Mackiewicz, a Perrysburg resident, was there to collect water to clean her young daughter's bottles and some dishes at home.

“We’re going to Bowling Green for dinner tonight because we can’t make any,” she said.

She’s needed a lot of bottled water with her husband, four children, and a cousin staying with them, plus the family dog. They were able to pick up water from Meijer in Rossford Saturday night.

Sylvania’s closest water station is Springfield High School, but Mayor Craig Stough said Sylvania residents have been doing just fine.

“We’ve gotten a few emails but no one is frustrated,” he said. “If people contact us and need water, the police and fire have been making home-bound trips to distribute water.”

He did say there are talks about trying to set up a water station at Southview High School if needed today. In Perrysburg, the water station at the Perrysburg High School Baseball Fields on Fort Meigs Road were scheduled to be open today from 8 a.m. until 8 p.m.

Ohio to investigate price gouging during water crisis

BLADE COLUMBUS BUREAU

August 4, 2014

COLUMBUS — Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine is sending investigators to the Toledo area to look into reports of bottled water price gouging in the heat of the weekend water crisis.

Ohio doesn't have a specific law on price gouging, but it does prohibit unconscionable sales practices. That could apply if someone sold water at a price known to be substantially higher than that at which it could be readily obtained.

It's also illegal to dramatically increase the price of product already in stock based solely on current events.

"We have seen the best of many Ohioans who have generously helped those needing water in the Toledo area, but we also have heard allegations of possible price gouging in the area," Mr. DeWine said. "We are actively monitoring complaints related to the Toledo water crisis.

"Those who think they are overpaying for water should contact the Ohio Attorney General's Office immediately and provide information about where the water was being sold and the price paid," he said.

Reports can be made by calling 1-800-282-0515 or visiting www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.

The Columbus Dispatch

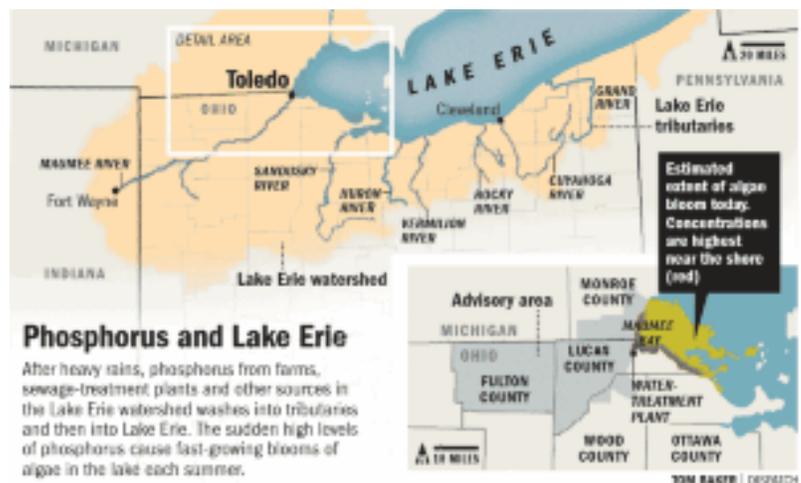
Toledo bearing full brunt of Lake Erie algae bloom

By Laura Arenschild

The Columbus Dispatch • Monday August 4, 2014 4:10 AM

The night before Toledo officials warned people not to drink the municipal tap water, Jeff Reutter opened a federal website to check on the algae bloom in western Lake Erie.

The picture didn't look bad, at first, to Reutter, an expert on toxic algae who is the director of the Ohio Sea Grant College Program. The algae covered Maumee Bay, but the bloom was significantly smaller than the one in 2011 that stretched past Cleveland, ruining summer beach trips for families along the Lake Erie coast.



A closer look gave Reutter pause, though. The most-intense parts of the bloom seemed to have settled right at the mouth of the Maumee River.

“It’s at the greatest concentration right in Maumee Bay,” Reutter said yesterday. “And, unfortunately, that’s where the Toledo water intake is” for the city’s Collins Park Water Treatment Plant.

Early Saturday morning, Toledo officials confirmed Reutter’s fears. Tests at the plant showed levels of the toxin microcystin in Toledo’s drinking water that were above the 1 part per billion that the World Health Organization deems is safe to drink.

Boiling water concentrates that toxin, so a simple boil alert wasn’t an option.

By 2 a.m. Saturday, Toledo had issued a warning that ultimately affected more than 500,000 people: Don’t drink water from the taps. Don’t even cook with it.

Microcystin can cause nerve and liver damage in people and animals. Symptoms can include diarrhea, vomiting, cramping and dizziness.

It was the second time that algae toxins had contaminated a public drinking-water system in Ohio. In September, about 2,000 people served by a water-treatment plant in Ottawa County, in northwestern Ohio, were without safe tap water for drinking or cooking for two days.

Reutter said the bloom over Maumee Bay now is “exactly the same situation” as the bloom that polluted water in Ottawa County last year. The wind patterns have kept it concentrated near where Toledo collects its water rather than spreading it throughout Lake Erie.

“There’s no problem over at Marblehead or any of the islands or Cedar Point or Cleveland,” Reutter said. “But the Toledo area is really getting the full brunt of this right now.”

Adults affected by the warning still can use the water for bathing. The World Health Organization allows up to 20 parts of microcystin per billion parts of water for bathing. Tests at the Toledo plant showed water there had levels as high as 2.5 parts per billion.

George Zonders, a spokesman for Columbus’ public utilities, said it is unlikely that toxic algae could shut down the drinking-water supply here because Columbus gets its water from more than one source. The city is installing a \$70 million treatment system in 2016 that will, in part, help deal with algae toxins.

Municipalities treat algae toxins with carbon. The toxins latch on to the carbon, and the combined particles are then removed from the water.

Algae flourish in warm, shallow waters, which makes Lake Erie — the shallowest of the Great Lakes — an inviting home. The algae feed on phosphorus, a key component of the fertilizers farmers spread over fields.

Studies at the National Center for Water Quality Research at Heidelberg University in Tiffin have found a direct link between farming and high levels of phosphorus in watersheds, Laura Johnson, a research scientist there, said yesterday.

“We know it’s coming from agricultural runoff. But in reality, when we think about why these farms are leaking phosphorus, that part of the story is far from clear and far from simple,” Johnson said.

Heavy rains can wash fertilizers from fields into the streams and rivers that feed lakes. Overflowing sewers, failed septic systems and runoff from lawn fertilizers also contribute to phosphorus in the watershed.

Ohio has no laws requiring farmers to limit the amount of phosphorus on their fields or that force farmers to reduce runoff. But lawmakers this past spring took a step toward tackling the algae problem when they offered farmers voluntary training before they use commercial fertilizers on their fields.

As residents of Lucas, Fulton and Wood counties in northwestern Ohio and Monroe County in Michigan tried to find clean water for their families over the weekend, the Ohio Environmental Council and the Alliance for the Great Lakes both called for increased regulation of agricultural and sewage runoff.

“We think there should be a minimum set of best practices that agricultural producers should follow,” said Adam Rissien, director of agricultural and water policy for the Ohio Environmental Council. “It’s not really fair to put the burden of controlling all of the runoff on the producers who voluntarily do the right thing.”

Algae blooms have hurt tourism and cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

Toxic algae have led to warnings about swimming and fishing at Grand Lake St. Marys in western Ohio and Buckeye Lake in Fairfield, Licking and Perry counties. The city of Columbus spent nearly \$800,000 getting rid of the rotten taste and smell in drinking water caused by nontoxic algae in Hoover Reservoir last winter. Toledo spent \$3 million last summer keeping toxic algae out of the drinking-water supply there.

Algae toxins are different from E. coli bacteria, which also has contaminated Buckeye Lake and Lake Erie beaches. Some strains of E. coli can cause severe abdominal cramps, bloody diarrhea and vomiting, but not the liver and neurological damage of microcystin.

Reutter said scientists and public water and health officials are concerned because the algae bloom in Maumee Bay is likely to spread on Lake Erie. Algae problems typically get worse in September and October when the water is warmer than in the spring.

Reutter said he didn’t know if Ohio legislators should force farmers to change their ways.

“As much as anything, that is a question for society and for politicians,” he said. “The question really becomes, ‘How long should we wait for voluntary practices to work?’ ”

The Columbus Dispatch

Lawmakers looking for fix to toxic algae bloom



Haraz N. Ghanbari | AP photo Algae is seen near the City of Toledo water intake crib, Sunday, in Lake Erie, about 2.5 miles off the shore of Curtice, Ohio.

By Jim SiegelThe Columbus Dispatch • Monday August 4, 2014 4:01 PM

State lawmakers are likely to kick off hearings soon as they search for answers on what caused [the toxic algae bloom that left Toledo without water this weekend](#), and what can be done to prevent the next one.

The sooner the better, said Rep. Dave Hall, R-Millersburg, chairman of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

“Are there some quick changes we can do to help the issue? Well, I want to be able to understand the algae bloom situation,” Hall said, questioning what mixture of farmland runoff, wastewater treatment plant overflow and Lake Erie dredging caused the issue.

The hearings would be designed to gather information in advance of lawmakers returning to action following the November election.

The House already has a wide-ranging environmental bill, House Bill 490, part of Gov. John Kasich’s off-year budget proposals, that could house additional proposals for dealing with algae blooms. The bill, among other things, proposes to transfer the state’s Agriculture Pollution

Abatement Program from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources to the Department of Agriculture.

“An incident like this, people are going to want to know how you fix it real quick,” Hall said. “I don’t know if I have an answer on a quick fix.”

Lawmakers have been hearing for years about growing concerns over algae blooms on Lake Erie. They unanimously approved a bill in January requiring many farmers to be certified by the state before spreading fertilizer on their fields. The bill, signed into law by Gov. John Kasich, is designed to limit the release of phosphorus into Ohio waterways.

“The farm community was willing to work on the reduction of phosphorus, which we know was the problem,” said Sen. Cliff Hite, R-Findlay, the sponsor of the bill. “But to feel the effects takes time. It’s hard to explain to people in the Toledo area that this is going to take time.”

Hite added: “If anything it’s brought it more to life. If we have to do more, we will.”

Hall said he plans to hold hearings on the algae bloom, likely in the Toledo area, where levels of microcystin, a toxin produced by blue-green algae forced nearly a half-million people to go without water for more than two days. The water ban has been lifted.

Going in, Hall is wondering if the heavy bouts of rain Ohio has experienced has caused excess runoff in water and sewage treatment plants.

“You’re probably going to see a lot of screaming going on over infrastructure of sewer plants,” he said. “Infrastructure is one of the issues we’re going to have to address.”

Upgrading water and sewage treatment plans is not cheap. Hall suggested diverting revenue from a new severance tax on fracking that passed the House and is awaiting action in the Senate.

“We had a spike a couple years ago. I’m surprised it’s just in a certain area,” Hall said of the Toledo crisis. “That tells me there was potentially a huge release of something that caused the cooking process in that area.”

In September 2013, algae blooms and microcystin forced Carroll Township to shut down its water plant. “There’s no question that if that was Toledo instead of Carroll Township, we would be in a different place today than we are,” said Sen. Randy Gardner, R-Bowling Green, who represents part of Lucas County and two other counties bordering Lake Erie.

While lawmakers and the governor have taken steps to address the algae issue in the long term, Gardner said short-term action is needed now.

“The immediate question is how can we promptly test and know as early as possible if there is a toxic algae problem, and how we can effectively treat for microcystin,” he said.

While the full algae bloom problem in Lake Erie is not as big as in the past, “we must learn as much as we can about why the algae becomes toxic. What is going on in the lake to create this toxic nature. That requires more research and a sense of urgency.”

The state needs to partner with local water systems, Gardner said, to ensure microcystin testing is occurring as frequently as possible. Money, he said, cannot be an obstacle.

“For those who are concerned about the environment, agriculture or the economics of the lake, this has always been a big issue,” he said. “But when you impact 500,000 people with something

as fundamental as clean water, there's no question this crisis has elevated the issue.”

Rep. Chris Redfern, D-Port Clinton, said research on Lake Erie is “desperately underfunded.”

“You can't expect scientists to do what needs to be done if they don't have the tools to do it,” he said, arguing that more money is needed for Ohio Sea Grant.

He also says the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency needs to quickly develop protocols for regular testing of microcystin.

“This is decades in the making. It will take decades to fix,” he said. “Once we determine there is a widespread problem, that's when we need to look at infrastructure upgrades and water treatment systems, and not merely shift the burden onto the ratepayer.”

THE BLADE

One of America's Great Newspapers

Past votes by leaders delayed upgrades

Collins, others rejected rate hikes for repairs

BY NOLAN ROSENKRANS - BLADE STAFF WRITER

August 5, 2014

Nearly as thick as the algae that threatens Lake Erie was a new sense of urgency to protect our water supply.

Politicians made pronouncements about ensuring that toxins won't threaten residents again, and criticized federal and state authorities for not addressing the cause of the algae blooms.

But locally, politics have frequently entered discussions about making necessary repairs and upgrades to the Toledo water system, including the Collins Park Treatment Plant in East Toledo. Votes on water rate hikes were debated and delayed while the plant literally fell apart, and Mr. Collins was in the midst of those debates.

Mike Bell doesn't want to say he told you so. But he told you so.

“Was it a shock that something happened? No,” Mr. Bell said.

In late 2010, the Bell administration raised alarms about the water system, and called for 9.9 percent water rate increases from 2011 to 2014. City leaders criticized past administrations for holding rates too low and neglecting the infrastructure.



One of the six pumps in the high service pumping station at the Collins Park water treatment facility.
THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

At the time, Mr. Collins — then a councilman — was critical of the rate hikes. He joined seven other council members who voted down in December, 2010, a Bell compromise of 9 percent increases, which was part of a package with higher sewer and storm water rates.



Mayor Collins — then a councilman — was critical of the sewer rate hikes initially.
THE BLADE/DAVE ZAPOTOSKY

Mr. Bell showed visible frustration at that vote.

“Any time we attempted to bring that issue and try to push it forward, it was met with a whole lot of resistance,” he said on Monday.

City councilmen Rob Ludeman and Mike Craig proposed smaller water rate increases instead. Asked if they regretted that after the weekend’s water emergency, both said no.

“It was more of an economic issue for me at that time on what might be affordable to the consumer,” Mr. Ludeman said of the proposal.

Mr. Craig said that upgrades to the plant funded by earlier water rate increases wouldn’t have prevented the weekend’s emergency, and pointed

out that council eventually agreed to the increases.

But not without drama. In January, 2011, City Council again rejected the proposed rate increases by a 6-5 vote, when Councilman Lindsay Webb left the chambers during the vote, blocking Mr. Bell’s ability to cast a tie breaker. Mr. Collins voted against it.

“What happened [this weekend] is not directly related to the plant,” Ms. Webb said.

Councilmen said they were trying to balance funding needed improvements at the plant with residents’ ability to pay during a recession. They eventually approved the rate increases in February, 2011.

Later that year, a pump station that brings raw water to the plant failed, nearly allowing contaminated water into city pipes. At the time, Mr. Collins expressed skepticism about the extent of the problem.

In November, 2011, the Ohio EPA released critical reports of the treatment plant, saying the building had not been maintained, creating a situation that could lead to a catastrophic failure. Among the many problems was a roof that was falling apart.

Mr. Collins said on Monday that he toured the facility at the time and saw for himself its decrepit condition. It was then, he said, that he realized how much work it would take to renovate the plant.

Repairs were approved for the facility, but more needed to be done. Last year, the Bell administration proposed significant rate increases again for water.

Council, including Mr. Collins, eventually approved a five-year hike that will increase rates more than 50 percent over five years, and approved \$150 million in repairs for the plant.

Mr. Collins said he wanted a plan in place within six months to modernize the treatment plant, and said current funds likely are inadequate to make those improvements. That will be painful for northwest Ohio residents,

“We are not going to allow this to be the cornerstone of the economic collapse of the city of Toledo,” he said.

“Fixing this is not going to be a simplistic situation. Failure to fix it will be the death knell of our community.”



ProMedica: 133 cases of diarrhea, nausea, and/or vomiting after water ingestion

Posted: Aug 04, 2014

TOLEDO, OH (Press Release) -

All ProMedica hospitals will resume normal operations on Tuesday, Aug. 5. Surgical procedures will be back on schedule Tuesday.

At this time, ProMedica says a recovery process is underway that includes flushing the water systems, sterilizing medical equipment, and sanitizing patient care units, floor by floor.

ProMedica hospital representatives will be contacting patients to reschedule elective procedures that were canceled.

If you have an elective procedure scheduled tomorrow and do not receive a call, please contact your physician.

Number of patients who went to the following ProMedica emergency rooms starting 4 a.m. on Saturday, Aug. 2 – Monday afternoon:

Toledo Hospital and Toledo Children's Hospital – **93** cases of diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting (said they ingested water)

Flower Hospital – **20** cases of diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting (said they ingested water)

St. Luke's Hospital – **20** cases of diarrhea, nausea and/or vomiting (said they ingested water)

No patients were admitted with severe symptoms.



Facebook Post

Toledo Zoo: animals kept under quality care during water crisis

WTOL Staff, Natalie Clark

Posted: 08/05/2014 5:55 AM



TOLEDO, OH (Toledo News Now) - While the water crisis was affecting hundreds of thousands of people, many of our viewers reached out to us about the safety of the animals at the Toledo Zoo.

The zoo reported to us that none of the animals suffered any illness or difficulty during the crisis, and they are continuing to be monitored closely.

Toledo Zoo Executive Director Jeff Sailer says he's relieved the water advisory has been lifted in the county, because even though the animals have been well taken care of, it's still been quite an inconvenience.



"We've been able to bring in water for them to be able to drink, so the animals really have been fine this entire time," Sailer said. "It's just been a lot of work for us, trucking in the water."

Sailer says it took multiple trips in a truck with a 400 gallon tank to get the almost 2,000 gallons needed daily for the animals, and that's just for drinking water. Even more water is used for pools.

"We've been able through some very nice individuals in the county to make use of their wells," Sailer said.

The Jerusalem Township Fire Department also assisted in delivering water.

The water crisis forced the zoo to close on Saturday. Sailer says it was disappointing but necessary for the safety of their visitors. The zoo opened back up on Sunday with its restaurants remaining closed.

Knowing the advisory has been lifted brings solace to the man in charge.

"It's a great relief," said Sailer.



Toledo-like algae bloom unlikely in Michigan

Tuesday, August 05, 2014

GRAND RAPIDS (WKZO) -- The algae bloom that sent toxins into the drinking water in Toledo, Ohio and part of southeast Michigan is not likely to happen in West Michigan. Wyoming water plant manager Myron Erickson says Lake Michigan is deeper and colder than Lake Erie, and that helps to prevent development of the algae. He says the intake for that city's water is 40 feet under the surface of the lake and a half-mile off shore. The algae that produced toxins rendering Toledo's water unusable for several days bloomed in shallower water with more sunlight.



Toledo water crisis passes but long-term threat looms

By: KAREN SCHAEFER

INTRO: Toledo public officials yesterday celebrated the end of a nearly 72-hour drinking water ban due to high levels of potentially deadly algae toxins pulled into the Toledo water system from Lake Erie.

But while the toxins have dispersed for now, the threat of another algae-induced water crisis still looms in many northern Ohio communities – and others around the Great Lakes basin. For Great Lakes Echo, Karen Schaefer reports:

SCHAEFER: Toledo Mayor Michael Collins was exuberant as he announced the end of a nearly 3-day standoff with Lake Erie's now notorious harmful algae blooms. After local confirmation of multiple tests by the Ohio EPA, US EPA, and the University of Lake Superior at Sault St. Marie, Mayor Collins decreed his city's water siege at an end.

COLLINS: We are lifting, in conjunction with the Ohio EPA, the no-drink advisory. Our water is safe...I'm pretty thirsty right now....[applause, under]

AMBI: Sounds of water distribution center, under:

SCHAEFER: But while Mayor Collins was lifting a glass of algae toxin-free Toledo tap water to his lips, local residents were still picking up packs of bottled water from distribution centers around the city. At Central Catholic High School on the near west side, the line of cars waiting for water stretched around the block. Chris Bishop, a Toledo auto plant worker, was one of the volunteers passing cases of bottled water through car windows to thirsty Toledo neighbors.

BISHOP: I think it's going to be a few more days before I trust drinking the water, I think I'm going to have to wait a little while [laughs].

AMBI: Sounds of someone directing traffic at the center, under:

SCHAEFER: Despite viral national news coverage over the last few days, some Toledo residents still seem unclear about why toxic blue-green algae has been burgeoning in Lake Erie. But others, like fellow volunteer Justin Richard, are well aware that fertilizer run-off from farm fields along the Maumee River – which empties into Lake Erie at Toledo – is the scientifically-acknowledged primary culprit for the blooms.

Richard believes Toledo's drinking water ban was a crisis just waiting to happen – and will likely occur again.

RICHARD: We've seen huge algae blooms before and a lot of people are saying that this is going to be a huge issue in the future. Well, I guess the future is now. And it makes me concerned that this is bound to happen again unless we take some immediate action.

SCHAEFER: While celebrating Toledo's handling of this water crisis, Eric Dgodenski [guh-GIN-ski], head of environmental health for the city, acknowledged that another algae bloom in the wrong place could easily shut down the city's water supply a second time.

DGODENSKI: The issue is a chronic issue and it's going to keep on happening until we address these issues, address these HAB's. We have to get the funds and resources in here to look at how do we stop it.

SCHAEFER: There's no question that Toledo's close call with toxic water has brought an under-reported regional issue to national attention. And that's important, because according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, harmful algae blooms are now a growing threat to public drinking water in all fifty states. Mayor Michael Collins says one his biggest frustrations was trying to assess the safety results of different testing procedures from multiple agencies. Collins believes one of the best things to have come out of his city's recent water woes is a new agreement on a single method to test for algae toxins.

COLLINS: We now have, as the result of an agreement with the Ohio EPA, the federal EPA, and in conjunction with our chemists, one simple standard test that will be used across the state of Ohio.

SCHAEFER: That single Ohio test could form the basis for a national standard for algae toxin testing. And that could speed up local decision-making about when public water supplies are once again safe to drink. In the meantime, Great Lakes cities as far away as Chicago and Buffalo are now testing for algae toxins in their drinking water, many for the first time.

And in Toledo, officials here know that they are just a wind shift or a series of rainy summer days away from yet another ban. For Great Lakes Echo, I'm Karen Schaefer.

GREAT LAKES ECHO



This closer view of the same area was observed on Aug. 1, 2014, by the Operational Land Imager (OLI) on the Landsat 8 satellite. The OLI image includes a special “coastal blue” wavelength band that allows scientists to adjust for visual distortions caused by the atmosphere near the coast. Image: NASA