

Protocol for Publicizing Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in California

1. **Initial Report and Technical Staff Communication:** For any HAB incident (suspected or confirmed) State Water Board and Regional Boards (Water Boards) staff will ensure that a report is submitted to the [Freshwater Bloom Incident Form](#) (Incident Form). This Incident Form also collects information on related animal or human illness. A completed Incident Form sends an alert to an inbox (CyanoHAB.Reports@waterboards.ca.gov), which is monitored regularly (all the time) and managed by the statewide Freshwater HAB (FHAB) Program.

The web based Incident Form collects information on each case and populates a tracking database. When an alert is sent to the inbox, it triggers Regional Water Board FHAB staff to review the report and prepare a summary to communicate the incident to the following:

- State Water Board HAB lead staff,
- Division of Water Quality HAB lead staff,
- Division of Drinking Water HAB lead staff, and
- CDPH duty officer; DutyOfficer@cdph.ca.gov (the CDPH Duty Officer will notify the County or City Public Health Officer and may notify the impacted water body manager)
- Impacted land and water managers and coordinate local response to the incident,
- County or City public health office, and
- [Division of Drinking Water's District Office](#) nearest to the incident.

The Division of Drinking Water's District Office will communicate with potentially impacted water purveyors and provide appropriate contacts to the Regional Water Board. Regional Water Board is requested to update the Incident Form's or tracking database as field observations, local actions (posting or de-posting advisories), and laboratory results are collected; State Water Board FHAB staff will provide support if requested by the Regional Water Board.

2. **HABs Portal and Dashboard:** All HAB incident reports are validated by Water Board staff before posting to the [HABs Portal and dashboard](#). Individual reports are depicted visually on the map with a brief summary.
3. **Initial Public Awareness via Social Media:** In some reported cases, where Water Board staff and management have determined the need to communicate information to the public about human, pet, livestock and/or wildlife risk, the Water Boards will use social media mechanisms to provide basic information on the incident immediately and prior to a press release. Posting and de-posting of advisory signs at water bodies will be the responsibility of the operator of the water body or site (i.e. land and water body managers).

4. **Press Release Template:** A template press release, found on the HABs Portal under [coordination](#), has been developed with standardized information on HABs, risks, advice for the public, and links to more information. The incident specific information can be inserted where appropriate.
5. **Official Press Release Coordination:** The Water Boards will take the lead on developing press releases to alert the public when HABs are identified. The draft press release will be shared (communicated) with CDPH press office early in the CalEPA approval process to allow feedback from CDPH. Other agencies involved, such as reservoir owners, state parks, county or city health departments, will be notified of the situation and the planned press release, but will not be involved in the editing process. Communication of a HAB incident must be expedited; therefore, contributions from other agencies (e.g. field observations, water testing, and posting of lakes) can be described in the press release but issuing joint press releases is cumbersome and slows down the process.
6. **Press Release Approval and Distribution:** The press release would follow the normal process for State Water Board, with review and approval by CalEPA before it is sent out by the State Water Board.