

Protocol for Publicizing Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) in State Waterbodies  
DRAFT

**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 [CyanoHAB Incident Form](#) web form (Attachment 1). This form and spreadsheet is monitored regularly and managed by the State Water Board HAB team. The electronic form collects information on each case and populates an incident tracking spreadsheet. The Departments of Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife and Parks and Recreation will be provided access to this form and will use it in a similar manner. The State Water Board, including the Division of Drinking Water (DDW), Regional Boards, and the departments of Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife, and Parks and Recreation will notify each other through email when they submit a report to ensure all agencies are informed of developing events.

The report triggers the State Water Board HAB team to provide support and the team will forward the report to the HAB lead staff in the Division of Water Quality, DDW, and the appropriate Regional Board. Other agencies will have been notified by email as described above. If the State Water Board HAB team determines the incident warrants a health notice, the team will notify the CDPH duty officer of the incident via email to [DutyOfficer@cdph.ca.gov](mailto:DutyOfficer@cdph.ca.gov). The CDPH duty officer will work with the CDPH Environmental Health Investigations Branch (EHIB) to provide notice to the Local Health Officers through the California Health Alert Network (CAHAN). In the event that no other agency responds to the initial notification, the Water Boards will continue leading on notification and public communication.

The Regional Board HAB Lead will also notify the impacted water body manager and County Public Health Office.

A statewide [Harmful Algal Bloom Incident Location Dashboard](#) (Attachment 2) has been implemented by the Water Boards that will provide all agencies with an up to date picture of HABs throughout the state. State agencies will monitor this Dashboard for current information.

**2. Initial Public Awareness via Social Media:**

In some cases, where Water Boards have made a determination of the need to communicate information to the public about human, pet, livestock or wildlife risk, the Water Boards will use social media mechanisms to provide basic information on the incidents immediately and prior to a press release. The departments of Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife, and Parks and Recreation will adhere to their policies regarding social media releases.

**3. Ongoing Reporting:**

As observations and lab results are collected, all agencies will update the incident's report via the [CyanoHAB Incident Form](#) web form. State agencies that did the initial notification of the risks in the water may not be following the lifecycle of the bloom and subsequent testing's that would lead to an "all clear" or water is safe to enter. This includes messaging, social media tweets or press releases. The local health officer or environmental health officer in that water body's jurisdiction will be responsible for the "all clear" message and would get the most attention from local or regional media on the issue.

**4. Official Press Release Coordination:**

When a state agency, such as Water Boards, has tested a water body within their jurisdiction for HAB and found a tentative positive field test that triggers their duty to disclose to the public, the following action will be taken. The state agency will prepare a draft press release for distribution as soon as possible to media and immediate stakeholder contacts that there is a water body that might pose a threat to pets or area residents and send it through their agency chain of command for approval. The draft press release will be copied to the appropriate sister agencies, such as Natural Resources and Health and Human Services. Upon Agency approval and distribution, the initiator would blind copy the appropriate sister agencies so that they know the press release has been distributed and can share or do their own respective chain of command notifications.

In significant multi-agency events, Water Boards will take the lead on developing press releases for CalEPA warning the public when toxic HABs are identified. The draft press release will be sent to the CalEPA Communications Office which will send it to the CHHS Communications Office. The CHHS will coordinate an expedited validation from CDPH. The press release may be sent after validation is received. The Departments of Water Resources, Fish and Wildlife and Parks and Recreation will work with the CNRA Communications Office to forward press releases to CHHS Communications Office in a similar manner for validation and release for significant multi-agency events they discover. (See Attachment 3)

There is also a [public fact sheet](#) that can be used in any information package (Attachment 4). [Blue-green algae talking points](#) are also available.

**5. Press Release Template:**

A [template](#) is attached that contains standardized information on algal blooms, a level of advisory: "Caution", "Warning", "Danger", reference to local signage, and links to more information. The localized information then can be added in at the top.