

JUNE 22, 2018

Sproat Lake water event

Important information from Dr. Paul Hasselback, Island Health Medical Health Officer regarding Sproat Lake water event

For several weeks, complaints related to odour and taste have been received from a variety of residents around Sproat Lake. Observations at the lake have suggested increased murkiness.

A number of possible causes of the incident have been suggested including algae, carp spawning, frogs, spring runoff, runoff from the Dog Mountain fire, clear cutting, increased seismic activity, increased human activity and others as well.

Additional testing of the lake water has been undertaken that suggests raw water quality is poorer than normal for the lake. Testing has not identified a specific cause for the change in water quality, and testing has not identified a specific risk for drinking water at this time.

While professional colleagues believe the cause is associated with algae, there is no definitive proof of a bloom at this time. Visual identification of a bloom sometimes occurs, often however, blooms may not come to the lake surface. They may not be visible and can change location within the lake over time.

Algae blooms have become more common in other lakes with similar human activity as Sproat Lake, and may be due to increased water temperatures as the climate changes. While annoying, algae blooms other than cyanotoxin producing blooms (blue-green algae) have not normally been associated with human illness.

Drinking Water Systems that are inspected and permitted by Island Health have not identified any evidence that treatment is ineffective. Island Health oversees permitted drinking water systems only, and while Island Health may provide advice to individual homeowners, the management and use of individual systems is not regulated under the Drinking Water Protection Act and is the responsibility of the homeowner.

As no identified failure of the drinking water systems has been identified, and a known contamination-event of the lake has not taken place, no water advisories have been issued.

Water from the lake that is used for drinking water, irrespective of where and what depth it is extracted, should be treated in accordance with BC's surface water treatment objectives

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/environment/air-land-water/surfacewater-treatment-objectives.pdf>.

Water that is not treated to these objectives has an increased risk to health. When the quality of the raw water worsens, that risk may increase and persons on water systems that do not meet the objectives or individual treatment may wish to further treat the water, or seek an alternate source. It is the duty of individual system operators to advise users if they do not meet these objectives and what plans are in place to meet these objectives.

There are multiple drinking water systems around Sproat Lake which are at various levels of compliance with the BC surface water treatment objectives and knowing your system is the responsibility of individual homeowners/residents.

- All water used for drinking water should always be treated in accordance with provincial guidelines.
- While taste and odour are unpleasant, they may not be indicative of a health risk.
- Boiling may reduce health risk in undertreated drinking water while not eliminating taste or odour concerns.

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