

RED TIDE

Here's how you can improve local water quality during red tide

Red tide occurs naturally; however, there are some things that we can do as a community to help make sure it doesn't get worse in our waterways.



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Author: Libby Hendren

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SARASOTA, Fla. — Red tide occurs naturally offshore. But there are some things that we can do to help make sure it doesn't get worse.

Scientists have put together a community playbook for healthy waterways. The [Gulf Coast Community Foundation](#) has an interactive look on its website for different ways to reduce nutrients from getting into our waterways.

One of them is fertilizer. When you use too much, and it runs off into our waterways, the nitrogen can feed macroalgae and phytoplankton. That clouds the water where seagrass needs to grow for manatees to eat and fuels algae blooms.

In Sarasota County, fertilizer is widely used on turfgrass like golf courses and athletic fields, lawns and some farms. But you may not even need it if you use reclaimed water.

“If it comes from the city of Sarasota, it’s got low nutrient content, and you may need to fertilize on top of it, but if it comes from Sarasota County or Manatee County, it has enough nutrients in it, you don’t need to fertilize and in fact, you need to be careful about how much water you add,” Dr. David Tomasko said. He is the [Executive Director of The Sarasota Bay Estuary Program](#). He says it’s easy to overdo it.

“If you want your lawn to get green or if you want your citrus tree to grow faster add nitrogen. If you want more algae in the bay and want the algae that are there to grow faster, add more nitrogen. But nobody wants to do that. The key is reducing the nitrogen that flows through runoff waters as a way of keeping the amount of algae in our system under control,” Tomasko said.

One of the biggest problems with excess nutrients added to the Tampa Bay area's waterways was the emergency releases from Piney Point earlier this year.



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“Piney Point was 200 tons of nitrogen in 10 days. In all of Tampa Bay, we expect to have a year associated with population growth so more people move to Tampa, that’s 17 tons nitrogen we want to offset just to hold the line. This is 200 tons. So it was like more than decade’s worth of population growth added to the bay in 10 days at a very high concentration as liquid fertilizer. So it is, without doubt, the biggest single nutrient load that we’ve experienced in decades in our systems,” Tomasko said.

Scientists believe those releases created a ripple effect of problems.

“It was really bad. We are still seeing problems we think are associated with Piney Point. We had traditional algal blooms. We had algal blooms out here in Anna Maria Sound,” Tomasko added.

RELATED: [Red tide levels in Tampa Bay at their worst in decades](#)

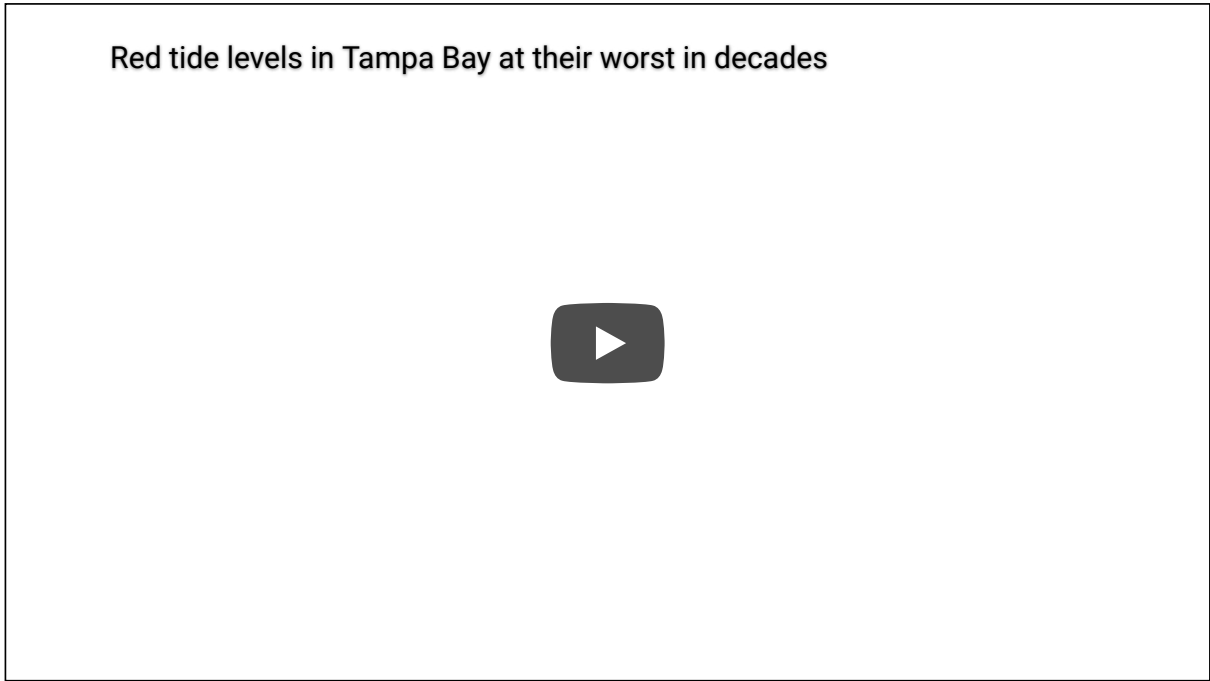
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Red tide: 3.6 million pounds of marine debris removed from Pinellas County

Water samples show conditions improving across the Tampa Bay area.



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Author: 10 Tampa Bay

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PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. — Red tide conditions continue to improve across the Tampa Bay region as one county says cleanup efforts have slowed down significantly over the past week.

As of Tuesday, workers across Pinellas County have removed 1,823 tons of dead sea life. That's more than 3.6 million pounds.

The county says there has been a big "drop-off" the past two days because "offshore winds have pushed the bloom farther from shore, and water quality monitoring results have improved."

RELATED: 'Patchy bloom' of red tide persists in the Tampa Bay area

Daily samples from [the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#) show red tide impacting parts of the bay area, but not to the degree of last month. Pinellas County is seeing low to medium levels of red tide off its coast.

To report a fish kill to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), call their hotline at 800-636-0511. For more resources, click [here](#).

Red tide is one of the water's deadliest enemies, and it occurs nearly every summer along Florida's Gulf Coast. Some years, however, it's worse than others.

RELATED: [Hands off: Sea-foam at the beach could contain harmful toxins due to red tide](#)


According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#), "red tide" is a harmful algal bloom or HAB, that is created when plants in the sea grow out of control and cause harmful toxins. Those toxins can have negative impacts on people, marine mammals, birds, fish and shellfish.

In Florida and the Gulf of Mexico, the species responsible for most red tides is called *Karenia brevis*, and is often abbreviated as *K. brevis*.

NOAA scientists say that although it's rare, red tide can cause human illness and even be deadly. Experts at Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission say the toxic chemicals that come from red tide affect both marine organisms and humans.

Karenia brevis produces brevetoxins that can affect the central nervous system of fish and other vertebrates, which causes these animals to die.

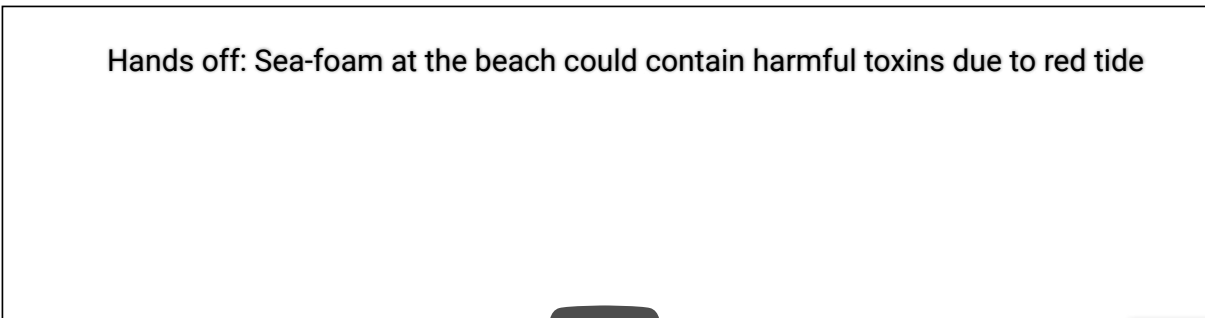
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