

RED TIDE IS GONE

Sarasota and Manatee beaches clear, and Ida might be to thank

Jesse Mendoza The red tide that's lingered off Sarasota and Manatee beaches has dissipated, and Hurricane Ida may have played a part.

Sarasota and Manatee counties had seen red tide since early July after Tropical Storm Elsa helped push *Karenia Brevis*, the organism responsible for the algae, toward local shores, where it killed fish and closed beaches.

Samples in recent weeks have shown a decrease in red tide cells, and on Tuesday, the Florida Department of Health in Sarasota found no traces at all. Sarasota County officials this week changed all beach signs from 'Red Tide Present' to now say 'Enjoy the Beach.'

Sarasota Bay Estuary Program Director Dave Tomasko took a boat out Friday to evaluate areas where seagrass was lost from red tide in 2018. He said the quality of the water has improved significantly in recent weeks.

'The water clarity is gorgeous,' Tomasko said. 'This is a good thing. This kind of shows the ability of this bay to bounce

back.'

Tomasko suggested that winds from Hurricane Ida may have helped blow red tide away from shore and into less nutrient-rich waters where it dissipates over time.

Tomasko also said this year's red tide bloom in Sarasota was not as intense as in 2018, but he noted the red tide in Tampa Bay was the worst in half a century. 'The difference between those two suggests that 2021 wouldn't have been as bad for Tampa Bay if it wasn't for Piney Point,' Tomasko said, noting the release of about 215 million gallons of wastewater from the former fertilizer plant facility earlier this year.

The estuary program is hosting a water quality restoration workshop Oct. 5 to discuss projects to improve the health of the bay so seagrass can thrive.

Healthy seagrass grows in a meadow in about 7 feet of water in Sarasota Bay. *Provided by David Tomasko/file*

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