

NEWS

What's that smell? New stench of dead fish fouls up Sarasota Bay



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Blue-green algae are blooming in local waterways, and a rotten stench has wafted from Sarasota Bay for at least the past week.

Only this time, it's not the red tide that often fouls up local waters by killing fish and marine animals.

Instead, it's *Lyngbya*, cyanobacteria that have been growing in abundance at the bottom of Sarasota Bay. It rises to the surface as it decomposes and brings about a foul odor as the winds blow clumps toward shore.

"It smells really bad," said Dave Tomasko, director of the Sarasota Bay Estuary Program.

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Lyngbya is one of hundreds of species of blue-green algae, and this particular species is not toxic to fish or marine animals — although its presence could be bad news for local seagrasses, and it can be toxic to dogs and horses.

Tomasko has been tracking the bloom since last week. He said it seems to be most concentrated in the upper Sarasota Bay, particularly north of Manatee Avenue. He estimates there are about 1,000 acres or more of *Lyngbya* growing on the bottom of the bay right now.

It has not reached the levels from last year when a *Lyngbya* bloom dominated lower Tampa Bay and Upper Sarasota Bay waters from late May through late July.

"It was massive last year," Tomasko said. "It doesn't kill fish by just being around, but it does cover the seagrass meadows, and if it gets tangled up on the leaves, it can pull up the seagrass leaves. When it's that thick and intertwined and tangled up with the seagrass blades, it reduces light ... So if it lasts long enough, it can have an impact."

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Tomasko said Lyngbya is typically found in local waters this time of year, but he is concerned that human impact is causing algal blooms to intensify.

"Even things that occur naturally this time of year are likely occurring in unnatural abundances because of the fact that we are just loading our bays with nutrients," Tomasko said.

Decomposing Lyngbya, and not fish kills, is likely responsible for the foul odor that can be smelled near some local beaches, Tomasko said.

"It has a fairly high protein content," he said, "so when it rots it smells really bad."