

Montauk advocacy group to monitor toxic algae in Fort Pond



The view of Fort Pond from the Fort Pond House at Carol Morrison Park in Montauk on May 31, 2016. Photo Credit: Gordon M. Grant

By Robert Brodsky

A Montauk-based advocacy group will begin closely monitoring Fort Pond for blue-green algae, which can produce toxins that are harmful to humans and animals.

Concerned Citizens of Montauk announced Monday that it would begin biweekly sampling of the blue-green algae blooms, also known as cyanobacteria, and on a weekly basis starting in June 2018.

The samples will be taken for analysis at a Stony Brook University lab run by Dr. Christopher Gobler, officials said at a news conference in Montauk.

Gobler, a professor at Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences, said blue-green algae is a serious threat to the health of humans, pets and aquatic life.

"Blue-green algae blooms have been sporadically detected in Fort Pond, but frankly, the monitoring of this water body has been entirely haphazard and thus very little is known about them," he said. "A consistent, time-series monitoring program such as this will serve as the foundation for establishing the extent of the problem, which is the first step toward devising a solution."

Exposure to blue-green algae — which is typically fueled by increased nutrient loadings from septic systems and storm water runoff — can cause nausea, vomiting or diarrhea, eye or throat irritation, allergic reactions or breathing difficulties.

The results will be posted for the public by the state Department of Environmental Conservation and used by the state Department of Health and Suffolk County Department of Health Services to determine if health or swimming advisories are issued.

"We must do a better job at understanding the blooms, their frequency, and their length," said Laura Tooman, president of Concerned Citizens of Montauk.

Blue-green algae was detected in Fort Pond during the summers of 2015 and 2017, closing the water to swimming for much of the summer season. The toxic bloom also caused the cancellation of the swimming portion of the 2017 Mightyman Montauk Triathlon.

Suffolk's Department of Health Services and New York Sea Grant will host a symposium on the action plan Wednesday in Great River.