

Karuk Tribe of California

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Toxic Algae Threaten Human Health in PacifiCorp's Klamath Reservoirs *Blooms worse than last year, little response from Company or County*

Happy Camp, CA – A recent analysis of water samples from Copco and Iron Gate Reservoirs reveal extremely high levels of the toxic blue-green algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* which produces a compound known to cause liver failure and promote tumor growth. Samples taken from areas frequented by recreational users of the reservoirs contained cell counts as much as 3,900 times greater than what the World Health Organization (WHO) considers to be a ‘moderate health risk’. The observation of blue-green scum on the water’s surface by water quality specialists indicate that toxin levels fall into the WHO’s high risk category.

The reservoirs are located on the Klamath River near the Oregon border between Ashland, OR and Yreka, CA.

According to Karuk Tribe Water Quality Coordinator Susan Corum, “It’s worse than last year. The responsible thing for PacifiCorp and Siskiyou County to do is to close these reservoirs immediately.”

Karuk water quality technicians discovered the presence of the highly toxic algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* last year while performing water quality tests. Until then no one knew that the algae was toxic.

Although county and PacifiCorp officials have had a year to prepare for the blooms, it appears that little action is being taken to protect the public. “While taking these samples, we observed swimmers and water skiers,” stated Corum.

World Health Organization (WHO) reports indicate that exposure to high levels of microcystin can produce symptoms such as eye and skin irritation, vomiting and stomach cramps, diarrhea, fever, headache, pains in muscles and joints, and weakness. However, chronic long term exposure can be more dangerous as symptoms may not develop until much damage has been done.

There are two aspects of chronic microcystin damage to the liver—progressive active liver injury and the potential for promotion of tumor growth. Tumor formation has been induced in laboratory studies in mice. Thus liver failure or cancer could result if someone is exposed often over the course of years.

Children are at the greatest risk because of their small size and propensity to accidentally swallow water while swimming. If a swimming child swallowed half a cup of water from the reservoir, they would be exposed toxin levels almost 400 times the WHO allowable Total Daily Intake.

The dams that create the ideal growth conditions for toxic algae are currently being relicensed. For years, Tribes, fishermen, and environmentalists have been calling for the removal of the lower four

Klamath dams to help restore what was once the third most productive salmon river in America.

“Now we know that these dams are not only hazardous to fish, they’re hazardous to people as well,” according to Karuk Vice Chairman Leaf Hillman. Hillman goes on to state, “These dams create horrific water quality problems. We expect this will make it difficult for PacifiCorp to get a clean water permit from the state of California.”

Under authority of the Clean Water Act, states have the authority to grant or deny dam owners a permit to relicense hydropower dams.

Concludes Hillman, “PacifiCorp’s lower four dams generate very little power, provide no flood control, and provide no irrigation diversions. All they do well is kill fish and create toxic algae blooms.”

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Editors' notes: Pictures of the sampling sites and a copy of lab results are available online at <http://www.karuk.us/press/press.php>

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