



# City Manager's Office

---

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** September 25, 2023  
**TO:** Mayor and City Council  
**THROUGH:** Doug Thornley, City Manager Approved Electronically  
**FROM:** Nathan Ullyot, Parks and Recreation Director  
**SUBJECT:** Urban Lakes, Blue-Green Algae, and the Human Response

---

Virginia Lake Park and Lake Park, two Reno parks with bodies of water are experiencing seasonal algae blooms. This annual phenomenon is a regular occurrence that happens in late summer and early fall. While there is no added cause for concern, people and pets are advised to avoid direct contact with the water for the next two months or until the bloom has ended. Blue-green algae blooms occur due to a combination of factors including lower water conditions, high phosphorus levels, and low circulation. These conditions are present at both Virginia Lake and Lake Park, however, there are no signs of algae blooms in pond waters at Teglia's Paradise Park, which has experienced them in the past.

“While algae blooms are a regular part of the seasonal cycle in some of our lakes, it is best for the safety of our residents and their pets to avoid direct contact with the water,” said Theresa Jones, Senior Civil Engineer at the City of Reno. “Even though the blooms change the appearance of the water, we should remember they are a natural and temporary situation that will resolve as winter approaches.” Reno Utility Services staff monitor urban lakes and will collect water quality samples for a class of toxins known as cyanotoxin when there is evidence of algae blooms. Recent tests show toxin levels are above [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) guidelines in Virginia Lake, however, these values fall within the same range of data collected during the same time period over the last five years. Toxin levels at Lake Park are below the same EPA guidelines.

When ingested, higher concentrations of cyanotoxins can be a concern for the health of people, pets, fish, and birds. The EPA says humans that ingest these toxins could experience abdominal pain, headache, sore throat, vomiting and nausea and dry cough. The agency also recommends pet owners to not let their pets drink or swim in the water. Animals can also be exposed by licking cyanobacteria or toxins off their fur or hair. Residents and pets can still walk, run, and recreate around the bodies of water, but they should not enter the water itself. The Parks and Recreation Department maintain permanent signage in English and Spanish around the lakes as recreating in the water is not allowed/recommended. This problem will take care of itself as the weather cools, but the recommendation to avoid contact with the water regardless of the current bloom.

The Communications Department has worked to notify the media and have shared the above information related to the current bloom with input from our Utility Services Department. Here is a link to Channel 2s coverage [https://www.2news.com/news/seasonal-algae-blooms-in-reno-lakes/video\\_f3c08d2b-ab73-5bf4-862b-64b3984c2584.html?utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=email&utm\\_campaign=user-share](https://www.2news.com/news/seasonal-algae-blooms-in-reno-lakes/video_f3c08d2b-ab73-5bf4-862b-64b3984c2584.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=email&utm_campaign=user-share). The story shows the aforementioned signs and Theresa does a great job of explaining the normal lake restrictions. It is possible that you may receive comment from the public on the appearance of the water.

For more information about algae blooms, visit the [United States Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) website.