



## Frequently Asked Questions about Algae in Lake Mead

### What are algae?

Algae are microscopic plants that are a natural part of aquatic ecosystems. Many environmental factors control the population of algae that exists in Lake Mead at any given time. Because these organisms are a primary part of the food chain, when the lake has too few algae, it becomes incapable of growing many fish. However, too many algae can produce scums and unsightly conditions. In Southern Nevada, federal, state, and local agencies continually work toward the goal of maintaining an appropriate balance of algae.



In 2001, a unique combination of factors caused an extensive algal bloom in Lake Mead (left photo). The photo on the right depicts the lake with its normal water color.

[Source: Southern Nevada Water Authority, [http://www.snwa.com/html/wq\\_water\\_facts\\_algae.html](http://www.snwa.com/html/wq_water_facts_algae.html)]

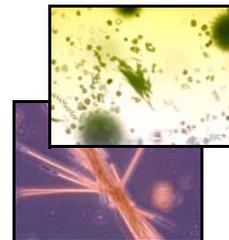
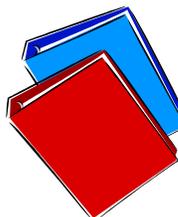
### What are blue-green algae and why should I care?

Scientists categorize algae by dividing them into several groups, including green algae, blue-green algae, and golden-brown algae. Blue-green algae are the oldest and simplest form of plant life. They are widely dispersed around the world, and are probably present in every river and lake, including Lake Mead. Normally, blue-green algae are not harmful. However, some blue-green algae can produce toxins, at times, and for reasons that are not fully understood.

### What is being done about blue-green toxins?

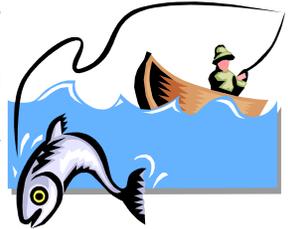
Because reports of toxic effects are rare, toxins from blue-green algae have not been considered a high-priority issue. There are currently no federal or state requirements to monitor for blue-green toxins, or any regulatory limits on the amount of toxin that is acceptable. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has identified blue-green toxins as a subject for future study, but no requirements are expected in the near future.

While the likelihood of people being affected by toxic strains of blue-green algae is very low, federal, state, and local agencies in Southern Nevada have pro-actively initiated a program to monitor and report excessive levels of potentially toxic blue-greens in Lake Mead and Lake Mohave.



### Should I stop eating fish caught in Lake Mead?

Blue-green toxins do not appear to accumulate in fish and toxic poisoning from the consumption of affected fish has not been documented. However, anglers should always use common sense - **do not** eat fish that appear unhealthy or were dead prior to being caught.



### How can I protect myself?

Monitoring efforts will serve as an early detection system to warn if a potential health threat is posed by potentially toxic blue-green algae. However, monitoring the entire extent of Lake Mead is impossible. Therefore, pay attention to public notices and be aware of the water in which you are recreating. Obey any warning or restriction if it is posted. Avoid contact with, and do not let children or pets get into water that contains algal mats or scums, appears discolored or emits a foul odor. If you note symptoms of skin or gastrointestinal irritation, consult your physician.

