

# Algae bloom blamed for bad taste in York water

*Water District activates emergency connection*



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YORK — The York Water District has been dealing with an algae bloom in the town's drinking water, a condition not uncommon in July, but a rarity for the middle of the winter, according to Superintendent Don Neumann, Jr.

The culprit is believed to be a lack of snow.

On Wednesday, Feb. 3, Neumann's office began getting calls from residents about a strange taste to the water, he said.

"York Water District Customers may be experiencing an unusual or unpleasant taste and odor in their water," Neumann said in a released statement on Sunday, Feb. 7. "This problem is being caused by a rare and unusual winter algae bloom in Chases Pond. This temporary problem is unpleasant but is not a health threat to people or animals that consume the water."

Neumann, along with engineers working on the problem, believe that because of the lack of snow cover, the ice over Chases Pond is acting as a magnifying glass, allowing the algae to grow. Chases Pond supplies much of the town's drinking water.

"We believe this type of algae is a cold water algae," said Neumann. "Like all algae, it requires a food source, the right temperature conditions and sunlight to cause a bloom. The heavy rain we experienced a few weeks ago probably flushed organic matter from swamps in the watershed under the ice in Chases Pond. That, coupled with the lack of snow cover on the ice, caused the ice to magnify sunlight into the water and result(ed) in an algae bloom."

Since Thursday, Feb. 4, the York Water District has used its emergency interconnection on Route 1 to get water from the Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells Water District.

"We are cautiously flushing hydrants throughout the system to gradually replace the water from Chases Pond with water from (Kennebunk, Kennebunkport and Wells)," Neumann said. "We have increased the distribution system samples to reassure our customers the water is safe to drink."

Crews have cut into the ice to sample water quality, said Neumann. Samples show the algae is concentrated near the intake structure.

"With this in mind we opened the flood gates at the bottom of the Chases Pond Dam to pull the algae bloom to the dam and release it away from the intake structure," Neumann said. "We are encouraged with the results so far."

An algae bloom is a rapid increase or accumulation in the population of algae in an aquatic system, according to Neumann. A dense spread of algae results from changes in the chemistry and/or temperature of lake water. Algae blooms may occur in freshwater as well as marine environments, he said.

Typically, only one or a small number of phytoplankton species are involved, and some blooms may be recognized by discoloration of the water resulting from the high density of pigmented cells.

Neumann said Thursday, Feb. 4, "The district is working closely with the Maine Drinking Water program and its engineers on this issue and wishes to reassure our customers that the water is safe to consume and there is no health concerns associated with this problem. It is simply an unpleasant aesthetic problem with the water. We do not anticipate this problem to last more than a few days."

Anyone with questions or concerns is asked to call the York Water District office at 363-2265, or the Maine Drinking Water Program at 287-2070. Updates are being posted on the Water District's Web site, [www.yorkwaterdistrict.org](http://www.yorkwaterdistrict.org).

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