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## Epidemic Of Algae Blooms Reported

By *PCC Staff* | on January 29, 2018

By Eric Gross



Ed Barnett, chairman of the Lake Mahopac Park District makes a point during the forum. Photo By Eric Gross

The numbers are alarming!

In 2017, Putnam County lost 267 beach days due to algae blooms – some 27 percent of all beach closures in New York State.

The staggering statistic was brought to a forum in Carmel last week by Eric Weigert, chief sanitarian for the New York State Department of Health, who led a panel of health officials discuss the dangers of algae blooms during a three-hour forum attended by county and town officials as well as camp directors, lake district personnel and John Q. Public.

County Executive MaryEllen Odell agreed that a remedy must be found: "This is incredibly distressing and startling. Beach closures not only impact our tourism industry but the health and safety of our residents is at stake."

Blue-green algae are microscopic organisms that occur naturally in lakes, streams and oceans that under certain conditions form dense blooms that discolor the water while producing floating scum.

Weigert explained blue green algae is a concern to the public because they often produce toxins that can result in adverse health effects in humans and animals when water containing dense blooms is contacted or swallowed or when airborne droplets are inhaled.

Health officials advised the 100 in attendance potential health impacts include, irritation of the skin, eyes, nose, throat and respiratory tract while swallowing water containing an algae bloom often results in nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

When a person is exposed to a blue-green algae bloom, he or she must rinse off with clean water immediately while considering medical attention for any symptoms associated with the exposure including breathing difficulties.

Odell encouraged the public: "When you suspect that an algae bloom is located in your family's favorite swimming locale, find another venue in which to swim. As a parent I would look as an alternate place to enjoy that summer's day."

Governor Cuomo has funded Putnam County allowing for the study of three venues where the algae blooms resulted in a tremendous amount of uncertainty and constant closing of beaches last year. The three bodies of water are Lake Carmel, Putnam Lake and Palmer Lake in Kent.

Legislator Carl Albano thanked the governor: "This will be very helpful. Hopefully other municipalities will be monitoring Putnam's progress and we all can learn what methods work best to control the algae blooms."

Kent Supervisor Maureen Fleming was concerned with the methodology and procedures used by health departments following the discovery of an algae bloom: "Last summer, several of our beaches were ordered closed until sampling was done, water sent to a lab and the results returned. By the time that happened, the blue-green algae had disappeared. Yet the beaches remained closed. A more sensitive test is needed resulting in not such a great loss of time for our beach-goers."

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