

Lee Health Department lifts river warning, issues advisory

Cape's Yacht Club Beach unaffected; remains open for swimming

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The Lee County Health Department has downgraded its warning about the Caloosahatchee River to an advisory, a sort of "look before you leap" advisement to people utilizing the river. The Health Department issued the health warning in June when toxic algae blooms were found east of Franklin Locks. Toxin levels have showed a significant drop in testing done as recently as July 11, so the Health Department is urging caution when it comes to the use of the affected portions of the river.

"The warning was a 'stay out' to both people and animals but the advisory is to look before you get in and make sure the water is clean and safe," said Diane Holm, Lee County Health Department spokeswoman. The Yacht Club beach in Cape Coral was unaffected by the earlier warning and remains open, according to city spokesperson Connie Barron, who said the city has not received any advisories that would prohibit swimming "We have not been noticed by the Health Department that there are concerns at the Yacht Club," Barron said Wednesday. Water at the beach is monitored and, if the Health Department has concerns about water quality, the city is notified and signs are posted to inform the public. The beach currently is open for swimming, Barron said. The toxic algae bloom, which was located near Clewiston, wasn't a direct threat to Cape Coral but water conditions were, and still are, ripe for that type of algae in all parts of the Caloosahatchee, officials said. If river water appears unusually bright green, or dead fish and animals are seen, then stay out of the water and certainly don't drink it, according to the Health Department. Kurt Harclerode from the Lee County Department of Natural Resources said to use common sense while enjoying the river. "Be prudent, which you should be all the time," Harclerode said. "If you see dead fish, don't scoop them up and take them home and eat them." A harsh dry season left water levels in Lake Okeechobee low, so the Caloosahatchee shouldn't expect any releases from the lake any time soon, according to Harclerode. Yet, as the conditions are still ripe, Lee DNR will continue to monitor the health of the river throughout the rainy season. The public will be well aware of any changes to the

river's health, he added. "We have sampling sites where we routinely monitor conditions," Harclerode said. "We will beef up our monitoring if we see any abnormalities." The Health Department is requesting that people report any breathing difficulties near water bodies by calling 274-2200. To report dead or distressed marine and wildlife call the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at (863) 648-3200.