

THE SUN-GAZETTE

Three Rivers residents cautioned against toxic water usage

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Three Rivers residents are told to steer clear of any water for daily and recreational usage from the Kaweah River as the heat continues to cause harmful algal blooms to grow

VISALIA – As the heat of summer continues to roast the Valley, Three Rivers continues to see the formation of Algal Blooms throughout the waterways. Residents are now cautioned against using water straight out the Kaweah River for daily use.

Due to observations of potentially toxigenic algae in the river, Tulare County Public Health is recommending that residents with drinking water intakes that draw water directly from the river not use their tap water for drinking, cooking, showering or brushing teeth until more information is available. There is not an easy fix to make the water less toxic. Boiling or adding chemicals in the water does not eliminate the toxins.

“We are encouraging residents to utilize bottled water or other water resources,” Carrie Monteiro, public information officer for Tulare County said. “It’s also important to know that the public water systems are not impacted by this, because we have confirmed that the depth that they are sourcing the water from the river are below the levels of concern as well as those that have been under regular testing.”

Local public health and state water quality experts are concerned there may be health impacts of those who are using the water for daily use, according to Tulare County Health and Human Services. Residents receiving water from local water companies are not included or impacted by this health advisory.

According to Monteiro, the county is taking an abundance of caution while they wait for test results, as testing for this particular toxin can take up to two weeks. Several agencies, including the Three Rivers Community Service District are continuing to test the water and algal matter. They are testing specifically for cyanotoxins, the bacteria that creates the toxic floating algal mats.

According to Three Rivers residents, most establishments located on the river will have a river well, a well that draws water from under the riverbed just as a hard well pulls water from underground. Unfortunately the county does not have a specific number of how many private wells are in the area. Without specifics, the county is unable to tell who has a river well and they also cannot confirm the intake levels from any particular well.

When water is taken at lower depths from a river or a lake, the water is not as affected by the toxins, "These toxins tend to stay up on the higher levels of the water surface," Monteiro said.

Tulare County Public Health is partnering with Self-Help Enterprises to offer water testing services for private domestic river wells, which draw water directly from the Kaweah River. Self-help enterprises said on a flyer to locals, that they will provide accurate information on the quality of water being pulled from the well. They also are offering, "short and long term solutions if contaminants are found."

Residents with private wells who are concerned with their water quality can contact Self-Help Enterprises Water Quality Program at 559-802-1285 or waterquality@selfhelpenterprises.org.

Health and human services asks those affected to be cautious when bathing infants and young children, as they may swallow the water. Additional things to avoid are drinking or using water from any appliance that is connected to water supply lines. This includes the water and ice dispensers in refrigerators, freezers and dishwashers.