



Great Lakes HABs Collaborative NEWSLETTER

LINKING SCIENCE AND MANAGEMENT TO REDUCE HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS **SPRING 2026**

CASE STUDIES: What does HAB communication look like across the basin?

Avoid the Ick: Spreading Awareness in Green Bay, Wisconsin

**Sarah Bartlett, Water Resources Specialist at
NEW Water Harmful Algal Bloom Communication Campaign**

Harmful algal blooms are common occurrences in Lake Michigan's Green Bay. Despite being a recreational hub, signage near Green Bay's access points was minimal, small in size, posted in overcrowded locations and not available in multiple languages. To amplify awareness of public health risks associated with HABs, an educational campaign called "Avoid the Ick" was launched in 2025 around the Green Bay area.

Avoid the Ick is a collaboration with NEW Water (Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District) and local partners and was made possible by a grant from the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program. NEW Water has spent 40 years maintaining a water quality monitoring program and seeing firsthand the green, soupy blooms that pile up at the boat launches by mid-summer.

NEW Water enlisted help from Brown County Public Health, and the O'Connor Connective, a local strategy and marketing communications consultancy, to develop materials to enhance awareness of this public



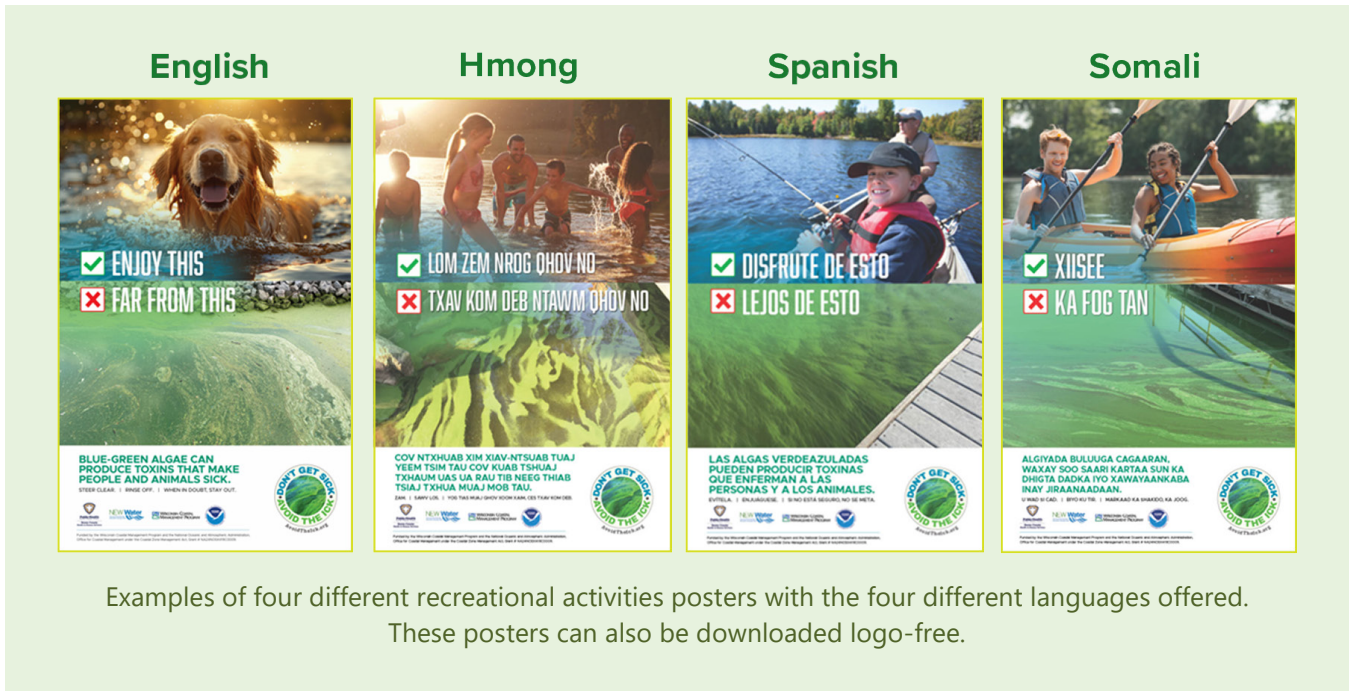
One element of the educational campaign was a promotional sticker of the newly designed logo.

health issue among the public. The campaign included designing a simple caution poster to be distributed around the county and at public access points to the water. Additional materials included a website, stickers, and posters that are accessible in several languages. The initial plan was to spread this message on a local scale, with the hopes that the campaign will spread throughout the Great Lakes region, and beyond. Materials are available for download from the website AvoidTheLck.org. Users can choose logo-free downloads and customize the materials to fit their local area and authority.

The educational campaign is focused on providing the public with information about how to keep themselves and their pets safe from HABs, while still emphasizing the outstanding freshwater resource that is Green Bay.



Redesigned caution poster with program logos local to Green Bay. The poster can also be downloaded logo-free and customized for different regions.



Examples of four different recreational activities posters with the four different languages offered. These posters can also be downloaded logo-free.

Pennsylvania Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force: Monitoring and Raising Awareness in Erie, Pennsylvania

Amber Stillwell, Coastal Outreach Specialist at Pennsylvania Sea Grant

Why HABs Matter in Erie

Harmful algal blooms occur when overgrowth of algae or cyanobacteria in water produce toxins, severely impacting humans, animals, and ecosystems. Triggered by warm water, slow movement, and high nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, these blooms can cause rashes, illness, or death in pets and humans. They're becoming an increasing concern in Lake Erie, particularly during warm

summer months when conditions favor rapid growth. While HABs occur worldwide, they have become a familiar and more predictable occurrence in Lake Erie's western basin and have been documented in Presque Isle Bay.

In response to blooms observed in 2013, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) formed the **Pennsylvania Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force** to better understand and address the issue. The following year, the task force adopted the PA Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Monitoring and Response Strategy, creating a unified approach to detecting blooms, monitoring toxins, and sharing timely information with resource managers and the public. The task force was facilitated by PA DEP until 2021 when Pennsylvania Sea Grant began facilitating the interagency conversations. Pennsylvania Sea Grant is the outgoing facilitator in 2026, and facilitation is currently in transition back to PA DEP.

With 11 public beaches and millions of visitors annually, Presque Isle State Park is one of Pennsylvania's most popular recreation areas. Unfortunately, it is also vulnerable to HAB impacts. Although Lake Erie is a primary focus, HABs have also been confirmed in inland lakes across the commonwealth, highlighting the need for broader awareness. The PA DEP also leads a statewide HAB Task Force focusing on outreach and research.



Harmful Algal Bloom at Presque Isle State Park.
Photo Credit: Regional Science Consortium.

Monitoring, Response, and Partnerships

The statewide task force brings together key agencies, including the Erie County Conservation District, Erie County Department of Health (ECDH), Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Pennsylvania Sea Grant, Penn State Extension, and the Regional Science Consortium.

Each member plays a vital role in executing the following directives each year:

- **Monitors environmental conditions and detects HABS**
- **Confirms blooms through field and laboratory testing**
- **Communicates risks through a public interactive map**
- **Recommends water use restrictions when needed**
- **Responds to potential human and animal health concerns**

This coordinated approach ensures public safety while delivering clear, consistent messaging to the community.



Pennsylvania Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force developed signage on Presque Isle State Park to connect action to test results.
Photo Credit: Pennsylvania Sea Grant.

2026 Outreach and Awareness Efforts

In 2026, the Task Force is expanding outreach to strengthen community awareness and engagement:

- **Summer Social Media Campaign:** Concise, shareable posts will help the public recognize HABS and find reliable information. Follow Pennsylvania Sea Grant on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#) and where the campaign posts will be available this summer.
- **Public Webinar:** A “lunch and learn” webinar to engage and increase public education is being hosted June 25 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. [Registration is required](#).
- **Veterinarian Outreach:** In partnership with the Erie County Department of Health, educational materials from the Center for Disease Control and Pennsylvania Department of Health will be shared with veterinary offices to help prevent pet exposures.

Through coordinated monitoring, strong partnerships, and proactive outreach, the Pennsylvania Lake Erie Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force is working to protect Lake Erie and local waterways while keeping communities informed and safe. To learn more about HABS and Lake Erie visit the [Pennsylvania Sea Grant Harmful Algal Blooms page](#).

Great Lakes Center: Connecting Science to Communities

Sara Guiher, Harmful Algal Bloom and Water Quality Specialist at Ohio Sea Grant Extension

The Great Lakes Center for Fresh Waters and Human Health is a partnership focused on harmful algal bloom research and outreach. Center projects are investigating how environmental conditions impact HAB growth and distribution, novel toxins and other products found in blooms, how toxins may be aerosolized and transported, and the impacts of aerosolized toxins on human health. As the outreach leads, the Community Engagement Core (CEC) gets information on center projects to audiences that need it.

Ohio Sea Grant (OHSG), in collaboration with Michigan Sea Grant as the previous CEC director, leads informal education efforts, hosting trips to Stone Lab for farmers, elected officials, conservation organizations, students, and others. They also meet communities where they are, attending events in Ohio and Michigan to talk to attendees about HABs and even play a fishing game to “catch” facts about HABs. Another OHSG outreach effort reaches Lake Erie charter captains, giving them the tools to collect water samples and talk about HABs with their passengers.

University of Windsor and University of Toledo (UT) round out the CEC, each with a distinct focus. University of Windsor’s program collects data during the winter in collaboration with the U.S. Coast Guard on their ice breaking vessels. This shares the center work with another audience and gathers information on lake conditions during a time when not as much data is collected. Researchers with the UT College of Medicine take their efforts to communities with their mobile air sampling and medical units. Those who live, work, or recreate near Lake Erie have the opportunity to learn about and even participate in research that is looking into the potential human health impacts of breathing aerosolized HAB toxins.

In addition to events and programs, the CEC and other partners in the Great Lakes Center are available to present to a variety of audiences on various HABs topics and the work of the center. Please reach out to Sara Guiher for more information or if you see opportunities for us to collaborate: guiher.10@osu.edu.



Sara Guiher with outreach materials at the 2026 Lake Erie Awareness Day on South Bass Island, Ohio.

Michigan HABs Group: Updated Resource Page and Video Clips

Erica Anculle, Extension Educator and Geneva Langeland, Communications Editor at Michigan Sea Grant

Michigan Sea Grant and state partners have continued to host “HABs 101” webinars on topics like HABs prevention and management, the power of plants, and first-hand accounts from lake managers. Webinar content is available as [clips](#) highlighting individual topics, such as nutrient budgets, septic systems, and algae treatment options for small lakes.

The [HABs 101 resource page](#) on Michigan Sea Grant’s website has been updated with the webinar clips and additional resources, including education materials from the Center for Great Lakes Literacy and a [free social media toolkit](#) with images and HABs facts formatted for Facebook and Instagram. Next, the resource page will feature a series of articles about different aspects of HABs management and prevention.

The image displays a screenshot of the Michigan Sea Grant website's 'Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) 101 Resources' page. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with links for 'ABOUT', 'TOPICS', 'EDUCATION AND PROGRAMS', 'FOR STUDENTS', 'RESEARCH', 'NEWS AND RESOURCES', and 'STORE'. The main content area features a large green graphic with the text 'WHAT'S THIS GREEN GOO? HABs 101 WEBINAR'. Below this graphic is a 'Welcome to HABs 101!' section with introductory text: 'Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are caused by cyanobacteria, tiny organisms that live naturally in the water. Despite being bacteria, they're often called blue-green algae, because they get energy from the sun like plants. Sometimes cyanobacteria and other types of algae can "bloom," or multiply quickly enough that their population can be seen by human eyes. Cyanobacteria blooms can make water look green or other unusual colors.'

To the right of the main content, there are three video clips under the heading 'Clips: The fundamentals':

- HABs Basics:** A video clip titled 'Harmful Algal Blooms 101 (clip from...)'. It shows a green screen with 'HABs B' and a red play button.
- The value of algae:** A video clip titled 'The Value of Algae (Distracting...)'. It shows a blue screen with 'What Are Algae?' and a red play button.
- Health impacts:** A video clip titled 'HABs 101: Health Impacts and Public Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) Health Impacts and Public Health Response'. It shows a blue screen with 'Alex Rabin, PhD, PEM' and a red play button.

Below the video clips is a large green graphic with a white text box containing the following text: 'HAB FACT: Blooms can look like spilled paint, pea soup, floating scums, mats, sheens, clumps, or streaks.' The photo credit 'Photo: Michigan Sea Grant' is visible in the bottom left corner of the graphic.

Resources, HABs facts, and webinar clips available through the HABs 101 resource page developed by Michigan Sea Grant.

Michigan Department of Health and Human Services Signage

Algae Awareness

Have fun in the water, but always look for harmful algal blooms that can make people and pets sick.



DO NOT touch water or shoreline with algal blooms. DO NOT swim or recreate near algal blooms. DO NOT enjoy clear water or shoreline with no algal blooms. Always rinse people off after any water contact. Always rinse pets off after any water contact.

Harmful algal blooms look like: spilled paint, pea soup, floating scums, mats, sheens, clumps, or streaks



When in doubt, keep yourself, children, and pets out!

Call your doctor or veterinarian if you or your pet/animal get sick after going in the water. For more information, visit Michigan.gov/HABs



WARNING

This water may contain harmful algal blooms:



DO NOT touch water or shoreline with algal blooms. DO NOT swim or recreate near algal blooms. DO NOT let pets swim in or drink water near algal blooms. DO NOT boat, jet ski, or fish in algal blooms. Always rinse people and pets off after any water contact.

Harmful algal blooms look like: spilled paint, pea soup, floating scums, mats, sheens, clumps, or streaks



When in doubt, keep yourself, children, and pets out!

Call your doctor or veterinarian if you or your pet/animal get sick after going in the water. For more information, visit Michigan.gov/HABs



DANGER: Harmful Algal Blooms

A harmful algal bloom has been found in this water:



DO NOT touch water or shoreline with algal blooms. DO NOT swim or recreate near algal blooms. DO NOT let pets swim in or drink water near algal blooms. DO NOT boat, jet ski, or fish in algal blooms. IF you went in the water DO rinse people and pets off.

Harmful algal blooms look like: spilled paint, pea soup, floating scums, mats, sheens, clumps, or streaks



When in doubt, keep yourself, children, and pets out!

Call your doctor or veterinarian if you or your pet/animal get sick after going in the water. For more information, visit Michigan.gov/HABs



Local health departments, in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), use various signs to alert the public to a confirmed or potential harmful algal bloom.

The need for signage on a water body depends on the water body and circumstances of a bloom and is typically determined by the local health departments and MDHHS.

Wisconsin Department of Health Services: HABs-Related Illness Resources

Ashley Vickers, Harmful Algal Blooms Epidemiologist at Wisconsin Department of Health Services

HABs are the rapid growth of algae or cyanobacteria in water that can harm people, animals, or the environment. In Wisconsin, cyanobacteria illnesses are a category II reportable disease. Reporting a HAB illness triggers a coordinated investigation conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). In 2025, DHS investigated 23 human illnesses related to HABs, and seven animal illnesses including three dog deaths potentially related to HABs. Illnesses that could be related to HABs are largely underreported. Most cyanobacteria blooms usually occur in nutrient-rich lakes during warm, calm weather, beginning in spring and ending in late fall. People can become ill from cyanobacteria or their toxin through ingestion, direct skin contact, or inhalation.

- **Diagnosis:** There are no clinically available diagnostic tests for cyanotoxins. Diagnosis is often based on symptoms following exposure to contaminated water.
- **Treatment:** Medical care is supportive, as there are no specific treatments or antidotes for cyanotoxin poisoning.
- **Symptoms:** Symptoms vary depending on the toxin and exposure route, can appear within hours after exposure and can affect the skin, respiratory, gastrointestinal, and nervous systems.

For more information on harmful algal blooms including resources for local and Indigenous health departments, physicians, veterinarians, a HAB guidance toolkit, and signage, please visit the [Wisconsin DHS webpage](#). To report a suspected HAB-related illnesses or the presence of a bloom in Wisconsin, please use one of the following:

- [Harmful Algae Bloom \(HAB\) Illness or Sighting Survey](#)
- [Call 608-266-1120](tel:6082661120)
- [Email dhshabs@dhs.wisconsin.gov](mailto:dhshabs@dhs.wisconsin.gov)



Examples of HABs signage developed by Wisconsin DHS. There are signs about how to scan the water for cyanoHABs before you swim, cautions, closed beaches, protecting pets, and more. Local public health, Indigenous Nation, and select Department of Natural Resources authorities may purchase them.

Wisconsin DHS has also developed a [HABs toolkit](#). The purpose of the HABs toolkit is to provide information to local governments and health departments in Wisconsin about preparing for and responding to harmful algal blooms. The toolkit provides background information, practical guidance, strategies, media release templates, talking points, definitions, and useful reference materials on this topic. The guides in this toolkit may be copied onto local agency letterheads for distribution to residents affected by harmful algal blooms.

HABs Calendar



IAGLR & SCAS-SCSA Joint Conference

Save the date for the joint conference of the [International Association for Great Lakes Research and the Society of Canadian Aquatic Sciences](#) to be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba from May 25-29, 2026. More details can be found [here](#).

13th US Symposium on Harmful Algae

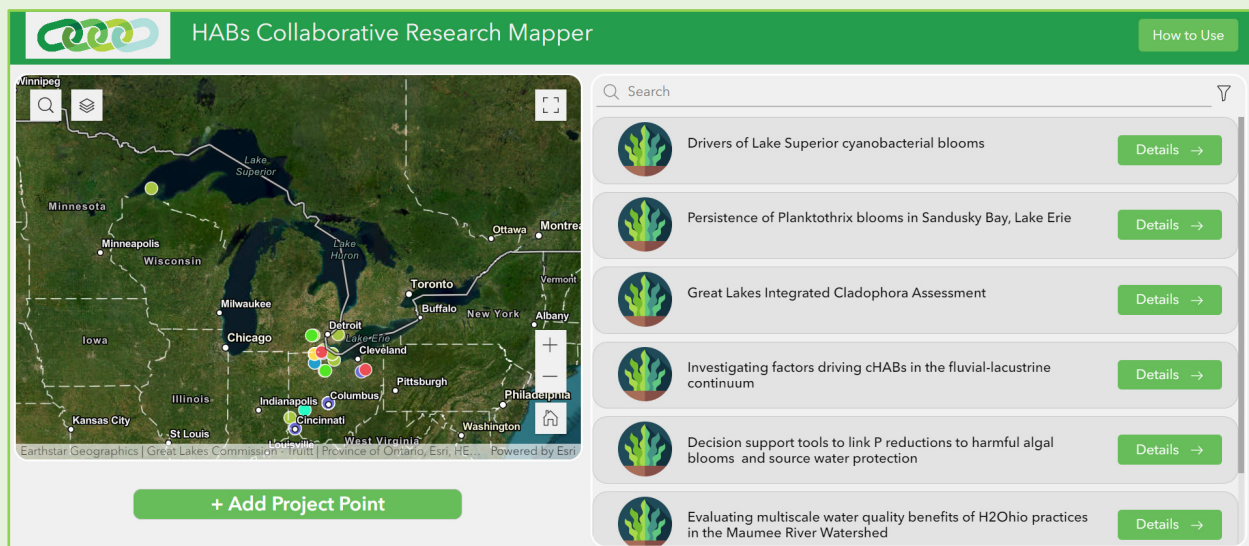
Join the HABs Collaborative for the [13th US Symposium on Harmful Algae](#) to be held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, from October 25-29, 2026. More information and event details can be found [here](#).

Harmful Algal Blooms, Hypoxia, and Nutrients Research Webinar Series

Hosted by U.S. EPA's Offices of Water and Research and Development in coordination with regional offices, this free webinar series is focused on communicating the latest, cutting-edge research related to nutrients and the priority impacts of nutrient pollution: harmful algal blooms (HABs) and hypoxia. Webinars are typically held bimonthly from 2 to 3 p.m. Eastern on the last Wednesday of the month. Find more information and a schedule of webinars [here](#).

Share your research project on the interactive HABs Research Map!

The HABs Collaborative has worked with the **Great Lakes Commission** to develop an app that increases collaboration among researchers and water managers working to investigate and address HABs in the Great Lakes basin. Visit www.glc.org/work/habs to learn more. Please reach out to **Connor Roessler** at croessler@glc.org, if you have a research project to add to the map



Get involved and stay in touch!

Find us on X (Twitter)

The collaborative is active on X (Twitter)! Follow us to get up-to-date information about our work and other HABs-related content. [@GLHABsCollab](https://twitter.com/GLHABsCollab)

Join our email list

To join our email list and receive announcements about the collaborative, please email Connor Roessler at croessler@glc.org