

Tainted

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"we had good results for many days following" the first evidence of the bloom, Goeres-Priest said.

In other words, the bloom hadn't turned toxic yet.

As the weather warmed, the bloom grew and developed toxins — specifically, the cyanotoxins known as cylindrospermopsin and microcystin.

Water samples taken on May 21 came back with results May 23 that revealed toxin levels high enough to trigger a health advisory for Detroit Lake.

There is, again, nothing particularly unusual about that.

Locals often reference the wildflowers and algae blooming at the same time of year — it's become part of life in the small tourist town.

Salem officials were confident enough they issued a press release on May 23 titled "City of Salem drinking water remains safe to drink."

Even so, there were hints something was different about this bloom.

Instead of one bloom — as was the

case in 2017 — testing revealed toxic algae in three different locations at the lake: Blowout Arm, Heater Creek Arm and near the dam.

More strikingly, the toxin levels were high in Blowout Arm — the liver toxin "microcystin" was tested at 48.21 parts per billion. A health advisory is triggered when levels are 4 parts per billion.

"It's not the highest level of toxin that we've ever seen, but it is high," Hillwig said.

"If you get a high enough level, the toxins can travel a long way downstream, so it could make sense that that's what happened here."

More testing, fewer answers

The toxins at Detroit Lake led to increased testing by city officials, including at Geren Island Treatment Facility on the North Santiam River.

Those tests showed concerning data. Tests from May 23 showed the toxin cylindrospermopsin at 6.9 parts per billion — above the safe threshold even for adults, according to OHA officials.

By the May 25 test, levels had dropped to 1.9 parts per billion — safe for adults but not for small children.

Tests of the water once it passed through sand filters and came out Salem of faucets were lower — though it's unclear how much lower. But the toxins were there, and at levels high enough to potentially sicken younger children, pets and those in poor health.

City officials got results of those tests on May 26 and 27, but didn't alert the public until Tuesday afternoon, an issue that's raised ire in the community.

At a press conference May 30, city officials didn't directly address why they didn't inform the public sooner, other than saying they didn't want to "jump the gun" and pointing out that most serious health impacts typically come after 10 days of exposure.

"We wanted to be proactive and inform the public because we're coming up on the 10-day exposure period," said Greg Walsh, emergency manager for City of Salem. "If people are exposed to it for 10 days that's when the probability of health issues increases."

Next steps

City workers are continuing to collect water quality samples to ensure the water remains safe, officials said Saturday.

Park

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regular duties for the city.

She finally settled on a plan to pour a stamped concrete overlook, bordered on two sides by retaining walls and landscape fencing and separated from the creek below by decorative railing. Fill dirt and new plants, such as Oregon grape, will cap the park there, eliminating the path that once ran behind City Hall's parking lot.

"Sue has worked hard on this, and we are delighted that it could be designed in-house. She's done a great job, and she's saved the city a lot of money," Saxe said. "Now we are going out for bid, hoping to get it done in late summer or early fall."

Summer is the busiest time for contractors, so Saxe said he hopes to secure favorable prices by pushing groundbreaking 'til late in the season.

As the project begins, the city will protect and incorporate the last onsite chunk of concrete, with its commemorative plaque, and, hopefully, later add

an information kiosk, Saxe said. Silverton Lions Club is also planning to donate a bench.

Once completed, the overlook will connect to the larger 7.5-acre Old Mill Park, which features bathrooms, a drinking fountain, grassy areas and asphalt paths running between the library and community pool.

Last year, the park's natural grassy amphitheater saw the first annual Fischer's Mill Music Fest, an outdoor bluegrass, rock and folk festival. It's scheduled to be held there again on July 21.

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Advisory

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Idanha and Detroit

The towns are above Detroit Lake. The water supplies for those cities have been tested and no toxins were found.

"They draw it from a tributary," said

Rebecca McCoun, Executive Director of the North Santiam Watershed Council.

Mill City

There have been no toxins found in the water supply. The city has used two municipal wells in the city for its water supply since 2005.

Prior to that, the city got its water from the North Santiam River.

Lyons and Mehama

The special district was awaiting results of tests of the water in the Lyons-Mehama District, but has not issued a health advisory about it.

Jefferson

The city draws its water from both the North Santiam and South Santiam

rivers — the South Santiam breaks off above Detroit Lake — and says its water is fine because it's diluted by the time it is sent to customers.

The city is expected to build a membrane treatment facility in 2019.

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