Vermont to Review New EPA Guidance for Lake Champlain Blue-Green Algae Toxins

For Immediate Release: May 12, 2015

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BURLINGTON – State agencies and local partners are gearing up for summer cyanobacteria monitoring on Lake Champlain.

Annual monitoring efforts by the Vermont Department of Health, the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Lake Champlain Committee (LCC) will be guided by new advice from the EPA on blue-green algae toxins in drinking water.

“We welcome the new science-based guidance from EPA, and will use it to determine the appropriate advisory level to protect the health of Vermonters,” said Health Department State Toxicologist Sarah Vose, PhD.

The departments of Health and Environmental Conservation and LCC have partnered to train drinking water operators on blue-green algae monitoring for the past several years, so that public water systems are prepared for blue-green algae blooms. The Health Department laboratory is also equipped to test for cyanobacteria toxins.

This summer, drinking water operators on Lake Champlain will routinely monitor their raw and treated water for toxins.

“DEC will be working with any water system providers that find toxins in their water to manage the threat to drinking water,’ said Ellen Parr-Doering, assistant director of the Drinking Water and Ground Water Protection Division.

Drinking water containing blue-green algae toxins can cause stomach problems and liver damage in humans and pets. Health and environmental officials plan to review the EPA guidance and incorporate it into Vermont’s existing advisory levels for blue-green algae toxins in drinking water. The updated advisory levels are expected to be in place by early summer.

Blue-green algae occurs naturally in the waters of Vermont, including in Lake Champlain, and thrives in nutrient-rich conditions. The algae can multiply rapidly in warm conditions.

Parr-Doering noted, “Source protection is the first line of defense for safe drinking water. Everyone should remember that keeping nutrients like phosphorus out of our lakes and reservoirs is one of the most important steps we can take to protect our drinking water.”

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