

FISH KILLS

Manatee County: Heavy rainfall from hurricanes may result in mass fish mortality events in local waters, known as “fish kills.”

Fish Kill Causes:

Most post-storm fish kills are the result of too little dissolved oxygen in the water caused by decomposing vegetation and/or rapid algae growth spawned by nutrient-rich floodwaters. Other causes of fish kills include:

- **Toxic Spills:** Storm-related damage to sewage plants, pipelines and other infrastructure can release hazardous materials into water bodies that may affect local fish populations.
- **Hydrogen sulfide:** High winds can bring bottom sediments to the surface and release hydrogen sulfide, which can be lethal to fish at high concentrations. Hydrogen sulfide can easily be recognized by its distinct “rotten egg” odor.
- **Salinity Changes:** Salinity levels can rapidly change as tidal storm surge enters freshwater systems or fresh floodwaters enter marine systems.

Toxic Algae Blooms: In addition to contributing to low dissolved oxygen levels, some types of blue-green algae, also known as “cyanobacteria,” produce toxins. However, most algae-related freshwater fish kills are a result of low dissolved oxygen levels as opposed to algal toxicity.

Health Concerns:

The health risks associated with a fish kill are difficult to determine without knowing the underlying cause. Therefore, it is best to use common sense and follow these general guidelines:

- Do not eat, collect, or use fish or crabs that were found dead or dying, or from areas where distressed or dead fish are present.
- Do not harvest or eat shellfish from waters that have been closed by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, or from areas where there are large numbers of distressed or dead fish.
- Do not harvest fish or crabs that are acting erratically or have sores or ulcers.
- Do not swim or play in areas where distressed or dead fish are present. If you come in contact with the water, immediately wash exposed areas thoroughly with soap and clean water.

Manatee County Health Department

Environmental Health Services

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- Do not let pets swim in or drink from water in the vicinity of a fish kill. If your pets come in contact with water, immediately wash their fur thoroughly with soap and clean water.
- Items that have come in contact with affected waters should be thoroughly washed with soap and clean water or disinfected with a bleach solution (mix ¼ cup of household bleach per gallon of water and immerse for 15 minutes) prior to continuing their use.
- Contact your physician if you believe you have become ill as a result of consuming or being exposed to fish or affected waters during a fish kill.

If you have other health questions or concerns about fish kills, please call your local county health department.

Reporting a Fish Kill:

The Fish and Wildlife Health Group at the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) has a toll-free hotline for reporting the locations of fish kills and/or diseased or abnormal fish. Callers should leave a brief message describing the location of the event and the number and species of fish involved, along with a mailing address and telephone number where you can be reached. Reports can also be submitted on their website.

FWRI Fish Kill Hotline: 1-800-636-0511
FWRI Fish Kill Website: <http://research.myfwc.com/fishkill/submit.asp>

If you see an unknown substance in a lake or waterbody and suspect the fish kill is a result of a toxic spill, please call Florida's 24-hour Hazardous Substance Hotline at 1-800-413-9911.

For further information, please contact your local county health department or visit www.doh.state.fl.us or www.FloridaDisaster.org.

The Florida Emergency Information Line: 1-800-342-3557.

Public Information Emergency Support Function: 850-921-0384.

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