

Circular

Title:	Algal Bloom in South Australian Waters
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Important Safety Advice for Rowing in waterways where the algal is active

Rowing South Australia receives updates from the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) regarding the developing algal bloom in South Australian waters.

We encourage members to be alert but not alarmed. SA Health is leading the public health response, and we will continue to monitor their advice closely. The Department for Environment and Water (DEW) is conducting water sampling. The SA water sampling dashboard can be found via this link [South Australian Harmful Algal Bloom - Water Sampling Dashboard](#).

Rowing is an on-water sport—not an “in-water” sport.

This distinction matters because participants are not immersed in the water, which generally reduces exposure. However, in capsize situations or when handling boats, incidental contact can occur.

Implementing equipment checks, hygiene measures, and vigilant supervision significantly reduces exposure risks.

Also, when the algal material is broken up and becomes airborne (e.g., wave action, spray), it can irritate eyes, skin and airways. If affected, move away from exposure and seek fresh air.

Algal Bloom Forum Summary – Latest Update - October

General Safety and Health Advice

Beaches and waterways are safe to visit, but individuals with asthma or respiratory conditions should:

- Carry reliever medication (e.g., Ventolin).
- Follow an updated asthma management plan.
- Avoid areas with visible foam or discolored water.

Foam presence may indicate aerosolized algal particles, which can irritate sensitive individuals. Public health data does not show increased medical presentations, but anecdotal reports suggest some respiratory discomfort.

BeachSafe App and Website - <https://beachsafe.org.au/apps>

The BeachSafe app now includes:

- Beach inspection and cleanup status.
- Foam and water discoloration alerts.
- Links to health advice.

Updated twice daily, with plans to increase to four times daily by December.
The algalbloom.sa.gov.au website is the source of truth for all updates and health guidance.

Surf Lifesaving and Patrols

- Seven-day patrols at eight key beaches starting 1 December.
- Patrol crews carry asthma kits and offer wash-down stations.
- Patrols may relocate dynamically based on beach conditions.

Beach Cleanup Operations

- Over 60 personnel daily across metro and southern beaches.
- Cleanup is manual (handpicked) to preserve marine life and support research.
- Waste is being diverted to composting, not landfill.
- Crews wear government-branded uniforms for visibility and community engagement.

Environmental Monitoring and Research

- Karenia algal counts are decreasing at many sites.
- South Coast beaches remain clear.
- Ongoing collaboration with universities and SARDI for species identification and research.

Mental Health and Business Support

- Stay Afloat mental health program extended.
- Small business grants and fee relief for aquaculture/fisheries under assessment.
- Hotline available 24/7 for urgent issues (fish kills, health support, etc.).

Communications and Confidence Building

- Government is working on clearer messaging to reduce confusion and anxiety.
- Clubs and schools are encouraged to:
 - Share consistent, factual messaging.
 - Use government-branded collateral (posters, graphics).
 - Promote safe aquatic events to rebuild public confidence.

School and Club Event Planning

- Risk assessments are critical and must be documented.
- Schools have protocols to reschedule or relocate aquatic programs if needed.
- Clubs should notify ORSR of upcoming events via the SurveyMonkey form.
- Include estimated participant numbers to help prioritise support.

- Beach cleanup coordination is available for scheduled events.

How to Engage with ORSR

- Use the dedicated email and hotline for event support. - ORSR.Enquiries@sa.gov.au
- Contact ORSR early for:
- Event planning assistance.
- Cleanup scheduling.
- Communications support.
- Funding inquiries.

Rowing SA reminds Clubs and Schools of the key points with earlier advice issues in September.

1. Understand the Algal Bloom at West Lakes.

- The harmful algal bloom caused by *Karenia mikimotoi*—first noted off the Fleurieu Peninsula in March 2025—has now reached West Lakes and other waterways which we row on, as confirmed by preliminary water tests (DEW website).
- This bloom is a natural phenomenon, often fuelled by factors like marine heatwaves and large-scale nutrient influx; there is no quick fix—it cannot be diluted or dissipated easily.

2. Best Practices for Rowing Clubs and Schools

- Stay Informed
- Keep checking DEW and SA Health updates for the latest water-quality alerts and guidance.
- Share this information with coaches, students, and families proactively.

3. Maintain Safe Operations

- If water appears discoloured or foamy, treat it as a potential irritant—even though rowing is an on-water sport, accidental contact or splash exposure is possible.
- Consider modifying sessions or locations until conditions improve.
- Encourage rowers to minimise direct contact with the water (no dipping hands or faces).
- Have first-aid supplies available, including water for rinsing eyes and skin.
- When algal material is broken up and becomes airborne (e.g., wave action, spray), it can irritate eyes, skin and airways. If affected, move away from exposure and seek fresh air.
- ***Individuals with asthma should carry their Ventolin and have a personal management plan in place. These individuals are at increased risk of irritation.***

4. On-Capsize Response (Emergency Preparedness)

Clubs and schools must ensure that all rowers are to have proper instruction in the actions to be taken in the event of a capsize, at least once a year.

In the event of a capsize:

- Help the rower stay calm (if you are close by).
- Rinse any areas of contact with clear water, once ashore.
- Shower if individual has been fully submerged.

- Watch for symptoms of irritation; if any occur, follow the health advice above.
- Rinse skin and eyes thoroughly with clean tap water (tap water is safe to use).
- Seek medical advice if irritation, coughing, or other symptoms persist. Call 000 in an emergency.
- Clean and dry all equipment that has been in contact with lake water.
- **Complete an incident report form, to report any side effects**

5. Operational Precautions

- Keep a first aid kit with eyewash and fresh water available at all times.
- Monitor official DEW and SA Health updates and adjust rowing programs accordingly.

Summary Table

Key Focus	Recommended Actions
Monitoring	Follow DEW and SA Health for updates; report concerns.
Exposure Mitigation	Avoid water contact if discoloured; rinse after any contact.
Capsize Plans	Ensure members are instructed; rinse after water contact; monitor health.
Rainfall Risks	Consider avoiding water activities 2–3 days after heavy rain.

Staying informed, vigilant, and prepared ensures that schools and clubs can continue rowing safely distancing themselves from the risks posed by the algal bloom and preserving the nature of rowing as an on-water sport.

Please familiarise yourself with the Algal Bloom and keep updated – by clicking the link to their [website](#).

If you have any questions regarding this advice, please do not hesitate to contact Christine Newberry, Operations Manager at Rowing SA, via the office phone: 08 8242 3288 or via email: cnewberry@rowingsa.asn.au

Warm regards,

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