



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE – 19 January 2023

Potential for *Phormidium* on the West Coast

As part of West Coast Regional Council's routine water quality monitoring programme, Hydrology Staff are watching West Coast waterways for any potential algal blooms of *Phormidium* as dry weather conditions continue.

Phormidium is a cyanobacteria, which has characteristics in common with both bacteria and algae and is often referred to as blue-green algae. It is the only freshwater cyanobacteria that is known to occur regularly on the West Coast. It occurs naturally and year round in many waterways, but when rivers are warm, with stable flows, it can grow quickly forming thick, dark mats over a large amount of a riverbed.

The West Coast Regional Council wants to raise the community's awareness about the possible consequences of this algae.

Science Team Leader – Water Quality Jonny Horrox, said *Phormidium* can produce toxins which are potentially harmful to human and animal health.

"If the bed of a river is covered with thick dark brown or black mats that have a slimy or velvety texture and an earthy or musty smell, it might be better to avoid these locations."

"If *Phormidium* is very abundant at a location where you wish to paddle, swim or walk the dog, then caution should be applied."

"Large amounts of *Phormidium* upstream of swimming locations can lead to skin irritations for bathers. Even small amounts of exposed *Phormidium* on river margins can pose a risk to dogs and children that might ingest the algae. If symptoms appear after being in contact with a waterway, contact your doctor or a veterinarian immediately."

Dogs are particularly at risk when swimming and drinking from rivers. Symptoms of cyanotoxin poisoning in dogs include panting, lethargy, muscle tremors, twitching and convulsions. These symptoms usually occur within 30 minutes.

"It's not possible to monitor all West Coast waterways for *Phormidium* blooms, so it's useful if people know how to identify it and apply caution when significant amounts are present," said Mr Horrox.

"At this time, we do not know of any specific sites that are of concern but this could change with the weather conditions we are experiencing."

To report a location with potentially problem levels of *Phormidium* in a West Coast waterway, contact the Regional Council Science Team on 0508 800 118 or email info@wcrc.govt.nz. If possible, please collect photographs showing the nature and extent of algal growth.

For information on dog safety around cyanobacteria click here: <https://www.ecan.govt.nz/your-region/your-environment/water/health-warnings/keeping-dogs-safe-from-toxic-algae/>

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Media contact:

Jonny Horrox | Science Team Leader – Water Quality | West Coast Regional Council | 021 190 3312

