

The Toxins of Summer

As we get into the full swing of summer, water is often the focal point of fun, whether that means a trip to the local pool, a water balloon fight in the backyard or a day boating on a lake.

It also means that it has been almost one year since Toledo, Ohio's microcystin contamination crisis. The cyanotoxin, a result of a bloom of blue-green algae in the city's Lake Erie source water, resulted in a do not drink or boil order being issued on Aug. 2, 2014, affecting 400,000 people in the Toledo metropolitan area.

In the wake of the announcement—which, according to John Keener of Toledo Water Conditioning Inc., took over TV channels and radio stations, preempting regular broadcasts—residents scrambled to find safe water for drinking, bathing and cooking. The line to buy bottled water at Toledo Water Conditioning went out the door and down the street, and Keener made efforts to raise awareness of the contaminant, creating a flyer and calling media outlets to provide information.

In the year since the incident, governments and associations have mobilized to determine how to stop it from happening again. The president of the American Water Works Assn. testified before Congress, providing recommendations on steps that need to be taken to reduce the nutrient pollution that can lead to cyanotoxin contamination. The U.S. senators from Ohio introduced a bill that would direct the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to publish a health



advisory on microcystin levels considered safe for human health. EPA's Great Lakes Restoration Initiative provided funds to help Great Lakes states reduce algal blooms.

Despite these efforts, another contamination event—whether due to microcystin or another contaminant—could be just around the corner. The list of potential con-

taminants is only growing, as pharmaceuticals, over-the-counter medications and other chemicals are increasingly found in water supplies. Because many of these emerging contaminants are not regulated, water treatment plants are not equipped to remove them from drinking water. Add to that the fact that much of the water distribution infrastructure in the U.S. is crumbling with age, and the result is that the water coming from the tap may include more than just refreshing H₂O.

The issues at hand include many layers, crossing the boundaries between all branches of the water treatment industry and all levels of government—in short, these are issues that cannot be quickly or easily resolved. It is up to water treatment dealers to ensure that their customers are educated on their water quality, and to raise awareness within their communities.

For more on Keener's experience during the Toledo crisis, read "A Toxic Situation" on page 38.

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