

Supporting Re-instatement of the Florida Harmful Algal Bloom Task Force

In 2016, the massive South Florida algal bloom that resulted in a state of emergency for St. Lucie, Martin and Lee Counties was for many, the culmination of ineffective water policy in Florida that has led to widespread nutrient over-enrichment and water quality impairment. Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs) are an important symptom of declining water quality. The risks of recreational and drinking water exposure to algal cyanotoxins has escalated over many years in Florida due to the increasing occurrence of HABs. The issue has now transcended ecological damage to one of major public health importance. There are some analysts that now consider HABs as the greatest inland water quality threat to public health in the U.S.

Furthermore, recent peer reviewed studies have identified links between HABs in Florida and an increased incidence of liver cancer in residents that may have been exposed. These are startling findings and now is the time to increase attention to this growing crisis in Florida.

Reinstating the Florida HAB Task Force is a meaningful step toward science based monitoring, prediction and notification of HABs. Twenty-two other states now have “actionable” guidelines codified in policy for addressing the challenge of HAB threats to public health. Federal legislation on HABs, currently under consideration, could bring considerable funding for HAB related public health issues nationally. Florida needs to plan accordingly to take advantage of any opportunity to address this growing problem.

The Florida HAB Task Force was initiated in 1999 and is still codified in Florida Statute 379.2271 despite being defunded in 2001. Renewed funding of the HAB Task Force through legislative appropriations during the 2018 Legislative Session is necessary for re-instating the valuable role the HAB Task Force was meant to address through enabling legislation in 1999.



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