‘That’s not right’: No air quality tests amid red tide, algae in SWFL

The awful stench at the beach and sightings of dead fish are becoming an unbearable experience Southwest Florida residents and tourists are dealing with.

It raises questions about the air we breathe, and why after months of problems, no government agencies have tested air quality.

“We had several of our patients that live close to the water or they work like in Fort Myers Beach that are clearly having problems,” said Pulmonary Physician Dr. Julio Conrado.

Dr. Conrado says exposure to toxins in the air is bringing in patients and creating health concerns.

“You cough,” said tourist David Schemenaur. “You kind of takes your breath away.”

Still though, no one is testing the air: Millions of fish have already died in the water, and birds are starting to succumb to the irritants in the air.

“I think it’s unfair to the citizens especially who live here. But, it’s also unfair to the visitors because they’re not being told ahead of time what’s going on with the air quality,” said tourist Cheryl Schemenaur. “It’s affecting everyone.”

The Department of Environment and the Department of Health released a joint statement in part:

“DEP and DOH will continue to work together to enhance the monitoring of air quality around harmful algal blooms.”

When WINK News asked if their plan to test the air quality using their active equipment already located on Fort Myers Beach, no response was given.

WINK News also reached out to the governor’s office, but have yet to receive comment.

“I would say, Rick Scott, what have you been doing?” asked James Grant, of Fort Myers Beach.
The Florida Department of Health says you can visit the site, visitbeaches.org, which is ran by MOTE, to see where red tide is occurring.

If you click a beach, you can see respiratory irritation conditions.

MOTE says they aren’t testing the air quality, but instead, are relying on trained professionals to count the number of coughs and sneezes heard on the beach to come up with their report.

“So we are reporting back to them on what our feelings is,” Grant said. “That’s not right, that’s not a test.”

MOTE is a non-profit research group.

While they are only counting the number of times people are coughing and sneezing out here, it appears they are the only group tracking air conditions.

The Department of Health and Department of Environmental Protection provided a joint full statement regarding the air quality. Read it in its entirety below:

"Florida has a robust system of monitoring and reporting of health effects of harmful algal blooms. It’s inaccurate to say otherwise. DEP and DOH will continue to work together to enhance the monitoring of air quality around harmful algal blooms. This could include additional public information, enhanced tracking and monitoring. If anyone has any concerns regarding air quality or the effect to their health can call 800-222-1222."