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NEWSROOM

PUBLIC RECORDS REQUEST

MEETINGS AND AGENDAS

E-NEWSLETTER

EVENT CALENDAR

Sept. 26, 2012

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State and local officials monitoring for red tide offshore Sarasota County

State and local officials from Mote Marine Laboratory and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI), along with Sarasota County Environmental Utilities and the Sarasota County Health Department, continuously monitor area waters for the organism that causes Florida red tide.

The Florida red tide organism, *Karenia brevis*, also known as *K. brevis*, is always present in our waters, normally at very low levels; however, results from beach water samples collected on Monday, Sept. 24, by the Sarasota County Health Department and analyzed by Mote Marine Laboratory, show a slight increase of *K. brevis* cells in a few spots along some Sarasota area beaches. The groups will continue to monitor the waters and beaches, but so far, Mote's Beach Conditions Report System has not turned up any impacts on beaches.

"We've seen a few areas with increased counts of *Karenia brevis* cells and we thought it best to take the opportunity now to remind the public of the things that our organizations always do to monitor the situation and the ways the public can get information about current conditions," said Sarasota County Health Department Environmental Health Administrator Tom Higginbotham. "While red tides can cause mild and short-lived respiratory irritation for most of the population, those with asthma or chronic respiratory impairments really need to be mindful of beach conditions so they can avoid areas if impacts are being reported."

A lack of quality satellite imagery available — thanks to extensive cloud cover here over the last five to 10 days — is making it difficult to get a good picture of what might be taking place in the Gulf. On Tuesday, Mote deployed an autonomous underwater vehicle, or AUV, equipped with a red tide detector just south of Venice to patrol from about 7 miles to 30 miles offshore. These robots help increase the coverage area for red tide sampling and the amount of time sampling can take place. They also are able to send real-time information to scientists back at the lab. So far the robot, nicknamed Waldo, has shown no indication of *K. brevis*, said Dr. Gary Kirkpatrick, the Mote senior scientist who developed the red tide detector on the robot.

Mote also has the Mote Beach Conditions Report System, which covers 26 beaches along the Gulf Coast, including those in Sarasota County. **There have been no reports of red tide impacts on any of the beaches in the system.**

Mote's Beach Condition Reports are provided by specially trained and equipped volunteer observers and updated twice daily (at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.), 365 days a year. Each report contains information about beach conditions, including whether there is respiratory irritation among beachgoers and other indications of red tide. Reports are time-stamped so that the public knows when it was last updated. Beach Conditions Reports are displayed online at www.mote.org/beaches where residents and visitors also can register to receive reports about specific beaches directly to their email inbox. For telephone updates, call 941-BEACHES and press 1 for Sarasota County beaches.

Current forecasts for east winds are expected to continue through the weekend, but it's important to note that winds can change quickly, said Kate Nierenberg, Mote senior biologist who coordinates the beach conditions report. "That's why we update the Beach Conditions Report twice a day; in case something changes from morning to afternoon, the public can be equipped with that information when planning their visits to the beach."

Health officials will continue to work with Mote Marine Laboratory, Sarasota County Environmental Utilities and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to keep residents and visitors apprised about concentrations of the red tide organism in area recreational waters.

Resource information about red tide:

- Sarasota County beach conditions: www.mote.org/beaches or call 941-BEACHES. Press 1 for Sarasota County.
- For biweekly red tide monitoring reports from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: <http://myfwc.com/research/redtide/events/status/statewide/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/hsb/hab/default.htm>
- Florida Department of Health: <http://www.myfloridaeh.com/medicine/aquatic/index.html>
- Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services: <http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/RedTide/RedTideInfo.htm>
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): <http://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/hab/>
- Health-related information/reporting of illnesses from exposure to red tide: call toll-free 24/7 Florida Poison Control Information Center at 1-888-232-8635.