

NEWS RELEASE



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Contact:

Jill Kurtz

SMLA Communication Director

communication@smlassociation.org

703-283-5813

The Smith Mountain Lake Association Announces Dock Watch Program

The Smith Mountain Lake Association (SMLA) announces a new initiative to assist with monitoring the lake for Harmful Algal Blooms (HAB). The SMLA Dock Watch program is going to be a resource for the community to expand monitoring of conditions at docks, year-round.

Last summer, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) issued an HAB Swimming Advisory for the entire Blackwater arm which lasted from early June until late August. It was the first time at SML that HAB conditions were so persistent and widespread. "The Swimming Advisory negatively affected SML residents, businesses, and visitors," said Bill Butterfield, SMLA's President. "We're gearing up to be better prepared should any adverse conditions surface again this year," Butterfield continued.

SMLA launched its **Make a SPLASH** campaign last month with a goal of raising \$100,000 to keep SML clean and safe. In its first few weeks, over \$7,000 has been raised, primarily from SMLA members and Board of Directors. These funds are being used to develop the Dock Watch Program. "It was an easy decision to donate to SMLA. If we all pitch in and protect the lake, everyone benefits," stated Tina Brown, an avid kayaker and Franklin County resident. **Make a SPLASH** funds raised will also be used to expand monitoring work in the SML watershed and to amplify the importance of safe boating.

The Dock Watch Program is aligned with the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's Phytoplankton Monitoring Network. This program engages citizen scientists in a community-based network of volunteers to watch for HABs. "The growing threat of HABs at SML requires that we begin to monitor at dock locations, our most common recreation contact point with the lake," remarked Keri Green, Chair of SMLA's Lake Quality Council. Normal water quality monitoring performed by SMLA, Ferrum College, and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is conducted in main channels locations rather than docks or shorelines.

Dock Watch Volunteers will be trained to collect water samples and to use laboratory grade microscopes to identify cyanobacteria, take photographs, and upload data to the Phytoplankton Monitoring Network. The data will enhance the national database used to monitor for and research emerging HAB trends. Most importantly to SMLA, the Association will be identifying and tracking HAB activity at docks, with rapid results, all year long.

Training for volunteers will happen in late February. By April, Dock Watch locations will be selected and monitoring will begin at a minimum of five docks around SML. As the lake community continues to **Make a SPLASH**, SMLA will be able to purchase more equipment, train more volunteers, and expand to more locations around the lake.

For more information about the Phytoplankton Monitoring Network visit <https://coastalscience.noaa.gov/monitoring-and-assessments/pmn/>.

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To donate and **Make a SPLASH** to help keep SML clean and safe, visit <https://smlassociation.org/donate/>.

SMLA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, all volunteer organization, whose mission is to protect the water of Smith Mountain Lake and promote safe recreation. SMLA is the longest serving advocate of the lake. The organization is administered by a Board of Directors with leadership from its Lake Quality and Water Safety Councils. These community volunteers and professionals lead dozens of initiatives that keep SML clean and safe. SMLA relies on donations, grants, and memberships to fund its programs.