



FOR RELEASE: July 23, 2012
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Ohio EPA, Lake Erie Charter Boat Captains Partner to Monitor Lake Erie

A partnership with the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association and an ongoing Ohio EPA water monitoring program are giving the state a more complete picture of water quality conditions in Lake Erie's Western Basin.

This month, Ohio EPA launched the Lake Erie Charter Boat Captains Sampling Program, which adds charter boat operators serving the Western Basin to Ohio EPA's team of water quality monitors.

In addition to Ohio EPA's own nearshore monitoring program, which began last year, the Agency will be collecting more data than ever before to track current conditions, particularly in the summer months when harmful algal blooms plague the Western Basin. It also will allow the Agency to monitor the implementation of good management practices in the watershed.

Ohio EPA received a federal grant to develop a comprehensive nearshore monitoring network beginning in 2011. Ohio EPA staff monitors water conditions monthly from 13 nearshore stations across Ohio's north coast between Toledo and Conneaut from March through October, collecting physical, chemical and biological measurements.

Earlier this year, Ohio EPA and the charter boat captains developed the idea to enlist the charter boats to help monitor water quality related to harmful algal blooms in the lake between Toledo and Sandusky. The partnership will allow Ohio EPA to collect data at locations and times outside the Agency's nearshore monitoring program.

The charter captains will coordinate with each other where they will sample to make sure four different areas are being sampled. They will collect samples during their normal charter outings. They will be met onshore by Ohio EPA staff who will get the samples to Ohio EPA's laboratory for analysis.

Later this year, Ohio State University's Stone Lab will join the partnership. Ohio EPA has awarded Stone Lab a \$50,000 environmental education grant toward the purchase of monitoring and laboratory equipment. In addition to processing the captains' water samples, the equipment will be used by students studying Lake Erie water quality issues at the lab.

Lake Erie's Western Basin is the shallowest, most productive and most ecologically sensitive region of the Great Lakes. Harmful algal blooms re-emerged in the lake in the 1990s and have worsened in the past decade.

Blue-green algae can produce toxins harmful to human and animal health and their odor and visual impacts can cause economic hardship on businesses that rely on the lake, including the charter boat industry. Algae also cause taste and odor issues in drinking water, adding costs to water treatment for communities using the lake as a source of drinking water.

Ohio EPA, in partnership with Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Ohio Department of Agriculture, has committed to addressing nutrient issues that are the primary cause of harmful algae blooms in Lake Erie. The draft Nutrient Reduction Strategy for Ohio Waters report is available at http://www.epa.ohio.gov/portals/35/documents/nutrient_reduction_strategy_framework.pdf. The state agency directors' working group report on agricultural nutrients and water quality is available at <http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/portals/12/docs/waterqualityreport.pdf>.