

Publication:The Dominion Post;**Date:**Jan 24, 2010;**Section:**Local;**Page Number:**9

State fights pollution

DEP: 6 streams test positive for golden algae

BY DAVID BEARD The Dominion Post

CHARLESTON — As legislators prepare bills to avert another Dunkard Creek fish kill, the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is trying to see what's on the horizon, and CONSOL Energy is taking steps to avoid further pollution of Dunkard.

DEP spokeswoman Kathy Cosco said the agency tested 19 streams for golden algae — *P. parvum* — which released toxins into Dunkard and killed most of the fish, mussels and other aquatic life.

Other than Dunkard Creek, Cosco said, the DEP has identified golden algae's presence in Cabin Creek, in Kanawha County; Elk Creek, in Barbour and Harrison counties; Tenmile Creek, in Harrison County; Fork Creek, in Boone County; and Simpson Creek, in Barbour, Taylor and Harrison counties.

"Obviously, we are concerned about these streams because we know that the toxins produced by the golden algae are fatal to the fish population."

Several legislators told The Dominion Post that they believe another disaster is looming — particularly at Cabin Creek.

HB 4001 — originated by Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia, and co-sponsored by other area delegates — would amend the existing Water Pollution Control Act to enable the DEP to develop standards to control levels of total dissolved solids (TDS) in state waterways.

TDS, according to the DEP and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, play a major role in the growth of golden algae.

The bill would require mining, gas drilling and other industries to conform with those standards for discharges into waterways.

While the DEP is concerned, Cosco said, the potential for disaster is unclear.

"The situation in Dunkard Creek is the first time the state has had to deal with the presence of golden algae," she said. "Therefore, it is difficult to predict whether there are other similar situations on the horizon. We will be monitoring intensely this spring other streams with similar characteristics."

Legislators said time is of the essence, and they hope to get a bill passed this session. Cosco previously said the DEP is looking at the 2011 session.

On Friday, she added that TDS is only one contributing factor that led to a golden algae bloom.

"The agency's biologists and engineers have learned a great deal about the algae, yet there is still more that is unclear, including what combination of factors has to be in place for the algae to bloom, and what triggers the algae to produce the toxins that actually killed the fish."

Which means answers will take more time.

Because the golden algae — a plant that thrives in salty water — isn't native to the state, the DEP isn't sure how it got into Dunkard Creek, or how it's spreading.

As far as getting into Dunkard, she said, "It is possible that it was transported by birds, on the waders of fishermen or on the pumping equipment of water hauling trucks that withdraw water from the stream. Air transport of cysts is another possibility."

In the meantime, the DEP continues to study ways to prevent more fish kills.

“We are researching ways other states have managed their streams after they discovered the algae, while we continue to monitor the streams with golden algae present,” she said.

The DEP believes TDS and nutrient levels are important variables in algae bloom. “Control of these variables in any water will be important.”

CONSOL and

Dunkard Creek

Following the summer fish kill, CONSOL voluntarily stopped pumping water from its Blacksville No. 2 mine into Dunkard Creek.

In December, the DEP issued an order allowing CONSOL to resume pumping, with certain conditions.

The DEP said it appears that water temperatures above 50 degrees are favorable for golden algae growth.

While it's cooler, CONSOL is allowed to pump water from its Blacksville No. 2 pool into Dunkard in order to lower the level for water storage when it's warmer and discharges would be unsafe.

CONSOL is monitoring its outfall from Blacksville No. 2 and reporting the results to the DEP, Cosco said.

The DEP and CONSOL will also meet monthly, Cosco said, “to ensure that the company is making progress toward meeting the conditions of the order.”

The first is next week.

CONSOL spokesman Joseph Cerenzia said the company must develop short-range and long-range plans to prevent TDS buildup. It must set up a temporary treatment facility for its Dunkard Creek discharges, so that if it's necessary to discharge water, it can be treated first.

By April, CONSOL must submit a long-term plan to DEP for a permanent treatment facility for its Dunkard Creek discharges, to be completed by May 2013, Cerenzia said.

And by September 2013, water treatment facilities at other CONSOL operations must be in place, he said.

While some reports suggested mine discharges contributed to the Dunkard Creek disaster, the DEP has never said that.

DEP reports talk about TDS levels and the algae, and that they increased downstream from mine pools.

For CONSOL, Cerenzia said, “Our position has always been, we're unsure why the algae bloomed.”

There's room for further study.

He pointed to an algae bloom in North Carolina unconnected to mines or high TDS levels.

In Dunkard Creek, he said, “for the last 20 to 30 years, TDS levels have varied in that discharge, but aquatic life has done fine. The only variable was the algae. ... How it got there is anybody's guess.”

In terms of the future, he said, “We plan to operate our mines in an environmentally sound manner” within state regulations.

CONSOL's focus, he said, is to preserve its mine operations and preserve the jobs that come with those operations.

