

HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS

How to Identify Harmful Algal Blooms in Freshwater

Algae, or one-celled plants, are normally found in fresh bodies of water and can grow rapidly when environmental conditions are favorable, including warm temperatures, calm water and a lot of nutrients in the water. This rapid growth of algae is called a bloom.

Harmful algal blooms (HABs) are blue-green algae that can produce a toxin, or poison, that can make humans and animals sick. HABs can have many colors and appear in different forms, making it difficult to tell a harmful algal bloom from non-harmful normal algae. Non-harmful, or green algae, do not produce toxins and are not harmful to human health. Here are some quick ways to distinguish a harmful algal bloom from normal, non-harmful algae:



Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR



Photo credit: Indiana DNR



Photo credit: Indiana DNR



Photo credit: Matt Meade – Wisconsin DNR

Harmful algal blooms:

- Occur near the shore
- Are evenly dispersed in the water
- Can be many colors including green, white, tan, blue, purple or brown
- Not seeing a harmful algal bloom in the water does not completely rule out exposure

HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS IN THE WATER

Can look like pea soup or spilled paint that has streaks of color.

Some blooms grow below the water's surface or along the waterbed. Pieces of these mats can break off and float to the surface.

HARMFUL ALGAL BLOOMS ON THE SHORE

Can look like dried mats or scum.

During decay, HABs can change color by releasing blue pigment. These algae are harmful both in and out of the water.

NON-HARMFUL ALGAE

Non-harmful algae can look like long, hair-like branches or wet cotton that is only green in color.

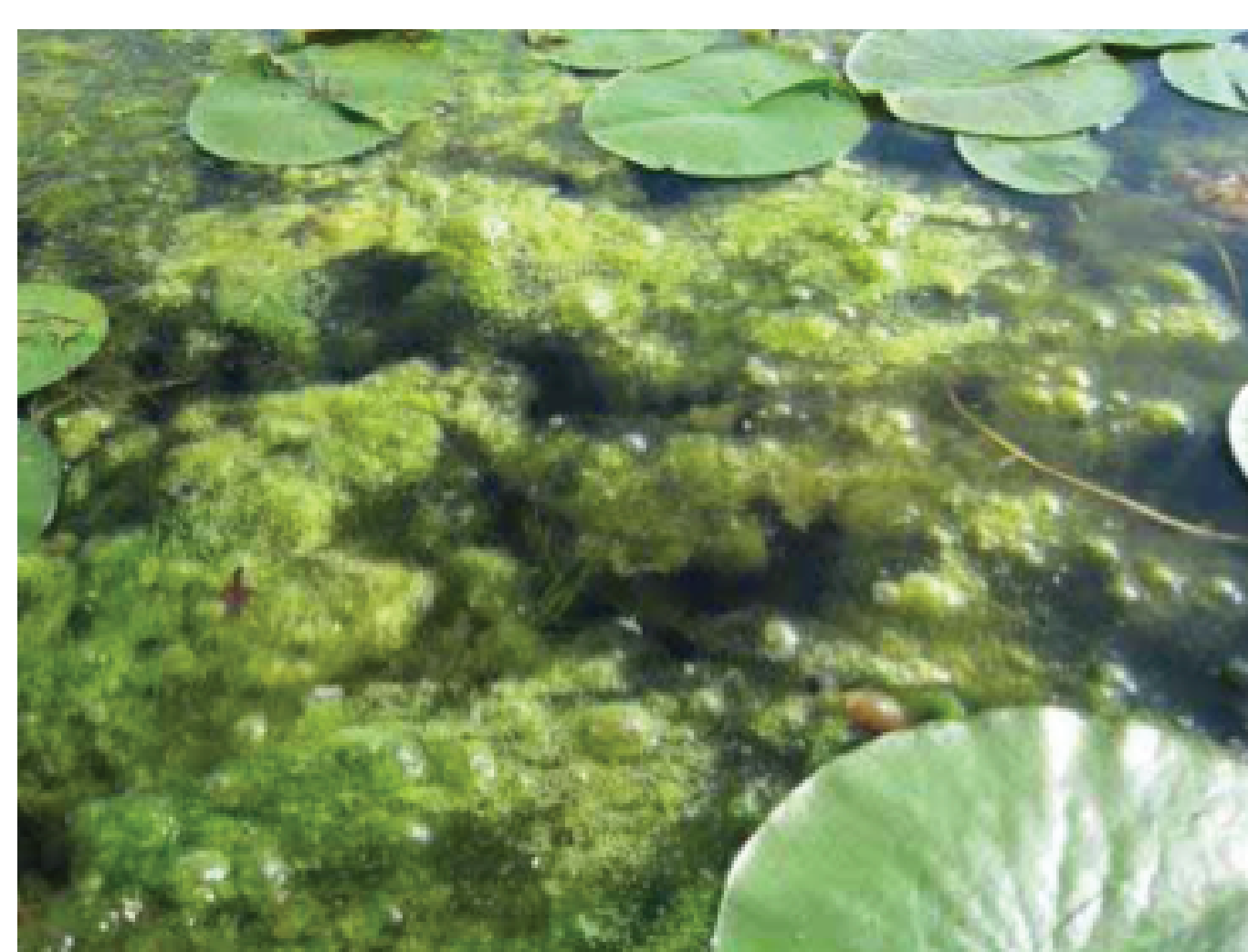


Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR

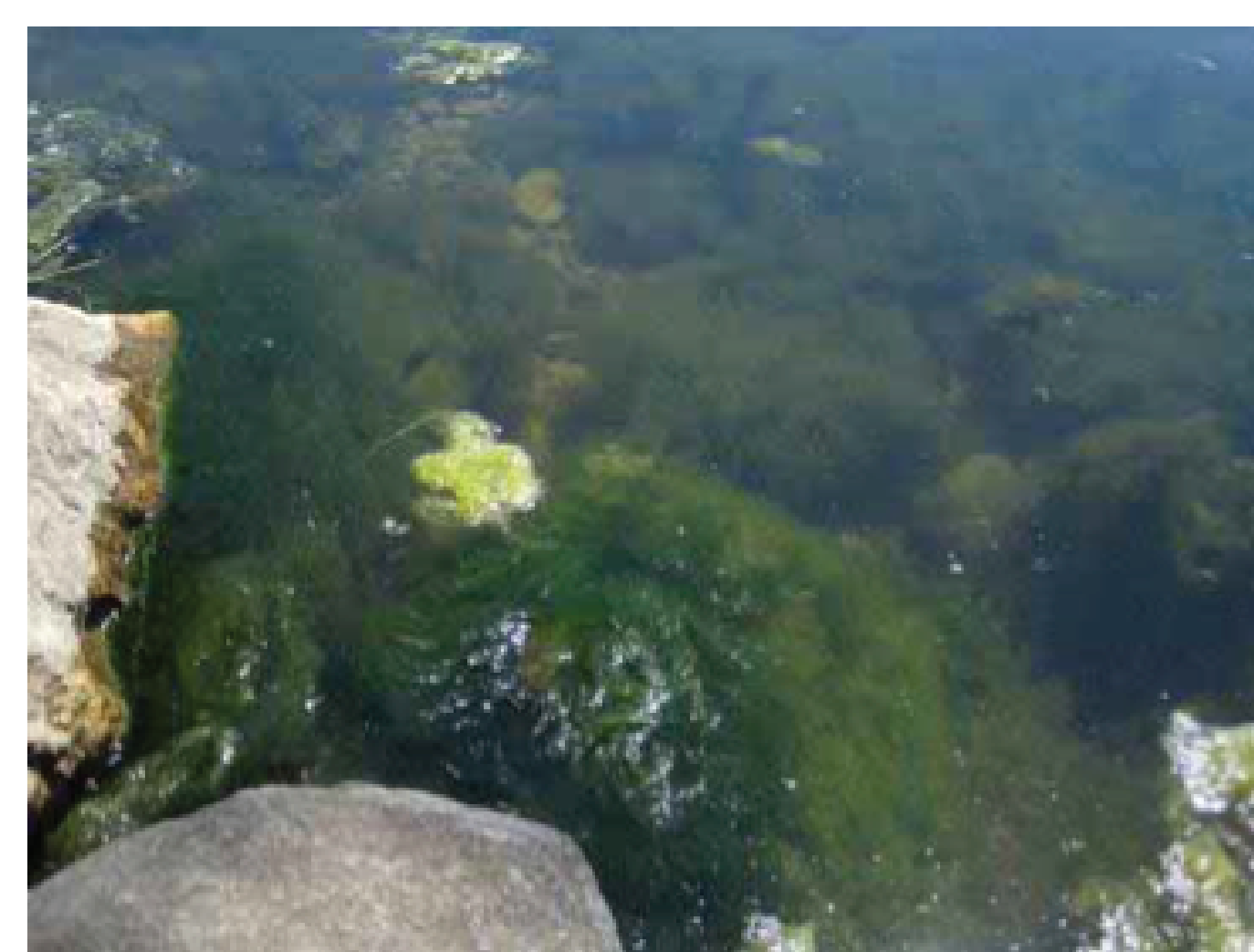


Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR

AQUATIC PLANTS

Normal water plants can look like algae but are not. Some of these include:

- Duckweeds
- Milfoil
- Watermeal

Pollen can blow on to the surface of water and can look like algae.



Photo credit: Gina LaLiberte – Wisconsin DNR

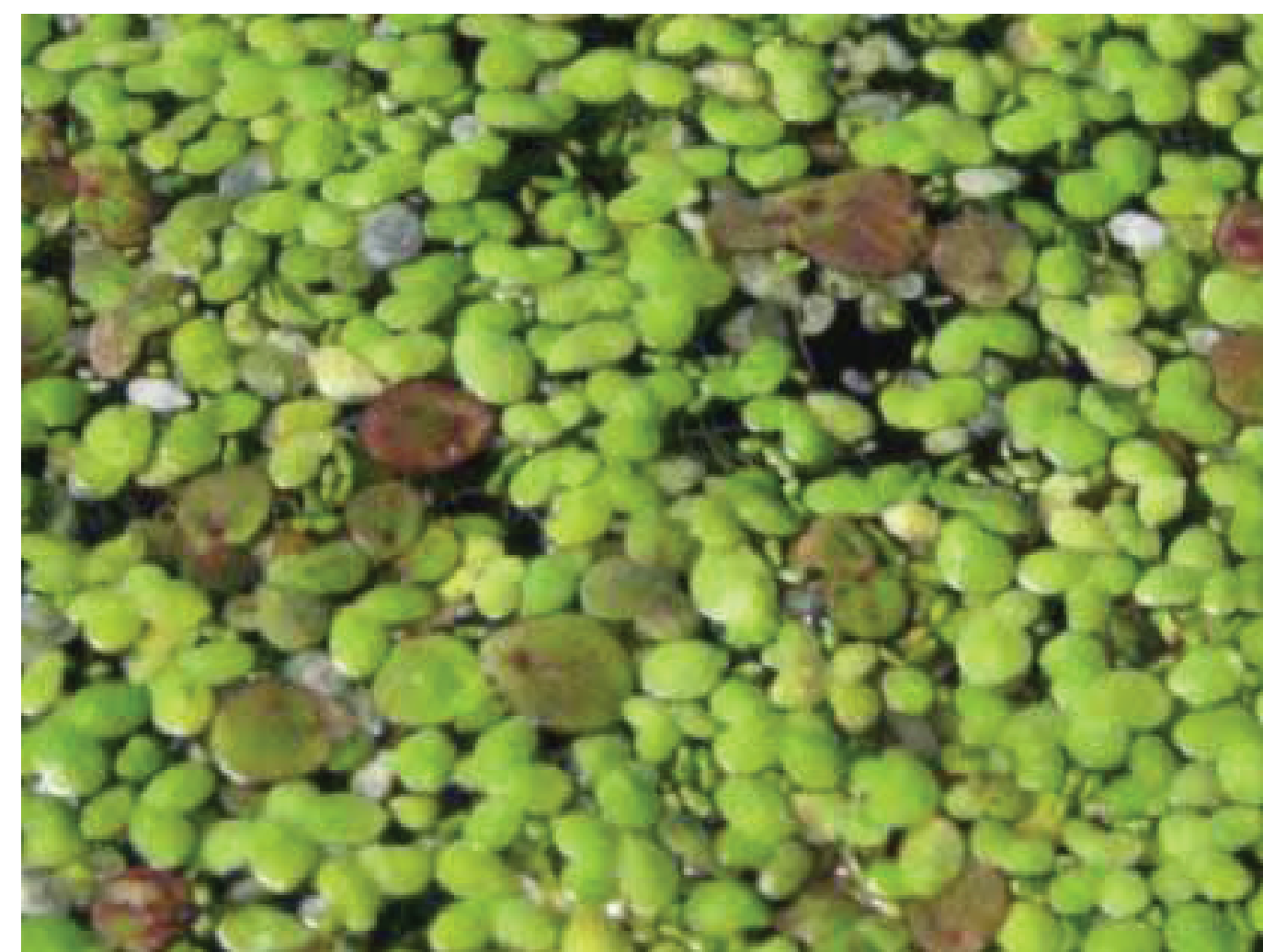


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For more information, please see the HABs webpage:

<http://www.state.in.us/25974.htm>



Indiana State
Department of Health