



New York Section of the American Water Works Association (NYSAWWA) Testimony to the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation

SUBJECT: Hearing on Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)

DATE: May 21, 2025 | Albany, NY

The New York Section of the American Water Works Association (NYSAWWA) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to the Senate Standing Committee on Environmental Conservation regarding the growing threat of harmful algal blooms (HABs) to New York's drinking water sources.

NYSAWWA is a membership-based organization representing water professionals and utilities across New York State. Our mission is to protect public health by ensuring access to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water for over 19 million New Yorkers. Given our role, we are uniquely positioned to comment on this urgent public health and environmental challenge.

Although freshwater HAB's have been documented for decades, they are increasing in frequency and are a growing concern for the drinking water community. Since 2012, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC) has documented HABs in more than 400 waterbodies across NYS and many of these are also drinking water sources.

Caused by naturally occurring cyanobacteria, HABs produce harmful toxins which pose significant health risks to humans and animals. The specific factors that promote algal growth in freshwater are well documented. These include increased nutrient loading, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, which serve as fertilizer for algae, promoting rapid growth and bloom formation. Sources of nutrient pollution include agricultural runoff, wastewater discharge, stormwater runoff, and the use of fertilizers in residential areas. Climate change is another critical factor influencing the occurrence of blooms. Rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events can create conditions conducive to algal growth. Less well known is how these factors interact to cause HABs.

NYSAWWA supports efforts by NYS DEC and others: Drinking water utilities that rely on surface water have been monitoring for and controlling algae growth in their sources for decades and will continue to remain vigilant in the face of the threat posed by harmful algal blooms. However, we are not alone in this fight and the NYSAWWA would like to acknowledge the outstanding work and support provided by both the NYS DEC and the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH) in combating HAB's.

Key initiatives include:

- NYHABS, a public-facing tool for real-time HAB tracking and reporting.



- Rapid notification protocols, which alert water systems when blooms are detected, allowing for timely monitoring and treatment adjustments.
- Public health protections, such as NYSDOH's conservative maximum contaminant levels for microcystin, a known neurotoxin.

The data collected in these efforts and investigations will lead us to determine not only the causes of these blooms but lead to prevention strategies. This integrated approach has strengthened outreach, improved transparency, and enhanced protection for both people and the environment. We are especially encouraged that data from these efforts will guide prevention strategies rooted in science.

NYSAWWA Supports expansion of current funding programs: Eradicating harmful algal blooms will require a long-term effort by all stakeholders as outlined in the NYS DEC's 2021 HABs Research Guide. New York is leading the way in providing a variety of funding opportunities that are designed to reduce nutrient enrichment of our water sources which is a major cause of algal blooms.

New York has already demonstrated leadership by offering funding programs that support:

- Nonpoint source pollution reduction
- Erosion and stormwater control
- Green infrastructure implementation
- Septic system repair and replacement
- Agricultural best management practices
- Intermunicipal collaboration to address nutrient loading regionally

NYSAWWA strongly supports the continuation and even the expansion of these funding programs and thanks this Committee for their leadership in advancing these initiatives. They are vital to ensuring clean, resilient water sources for generations to come.

NYSAWWA supports bills to reduce nutrient loading but asks for consideration of undue reporting requirements: We respectfully urge the Committee to carefully consider the implications of bills highlighted below:

- S3506 – The Harmful Algal Bloom Prevention Act: While well-intentioned, this bill introduces reporting requirements that could overburden water utilities already dedicating significant resources to bloom prevention and response. Many of these reporting mechanisms duplicate what is already successfully managed by NYSDEC and NYSDOH.
 - NYSAWWA Opposes due to duplicative efforts.
- S3055 – Tax Exemption for Advanced Septic Systems: We support this legislation, which would exempt innovative septic systems from sales and use tax. These systems



significantly reduce nutrient runoff and would incentivize more widespread adoption, helping to limit a key driver of HABs.

- NYSAWWA Supports

On behalf of New York’s drinking water suppliers, we thank this Committee for the careful consideration of this testimony. We urge the Committee to continue supporting science-based, agency-led solutions and to expand investments in infrastructure, innovation, and inter-agency collaboration.

We look forward to working together to meet the challenges ahead—and to uphold the constitutional right of all New Yorkers to safe, clean, and affordable drinking water.