



For Immediate Release
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LDEQ evaluating water quality in Lake Charles

BATON ROUGE – LDEQ Secretary Chuck Carr Brown ordered teams from the Office of Environmental Assessment Water Survey Group to the Lake Charles area after reports of odors and poor water quality were received by the agency. The teams began work Friday, Sept. 11, and will concentrate on Lake Charles and Prien lakes.

Earlier assessments by the agency indicated that large amounts of vegetation were impacted by the storm surge and saltwater intrusion of Hurricane Laura on Aug. 27. “The dead vegetation decays, and that process consumes dissolved oxygen from water bodies,” LDEQ Environmental Scientist David Greenwood said. “That oxygen depletion impacts both plant life and fish. We saw a fish kill in Lake Charles, and the dead fish and dead vegetation generate odors.”

Brown acknowledged the odors can be offensive, but in most cases are not a threat to human health and the environment. “The current situation will follow its natural course and dissipate as the tides flow in and out. We will work to model a timeframe.”

LDWF Secretary Jack Montoucet said his agency investigated the fish kill. “Our biologists reported low dissolved oxygen readings in waters near the fish kill, most likely from excessive amounts of decaying vegetation pushed in by Hurricane Laura’s surge waters and the continued decomposition of that vegetative material,” Montoucet said. “Biologists found species such as Gulf menhaden, mullet, catfish, carp, Atlantic croaker, red drum, black drum, and others were present.”

Brown said LDEQ assessment teams are still working to locate any petroleum spills or leaks in the storm zone. He cautioned observers against assuming any sheen or dark material on water is from oil. Greenwood concurred. “If you don’t know what it is you’re looking at, you may not be able to tell if it’s oil or vegetative material,” Greenwood said. “When that vegetative material decays, it releases substances that can look exactly like an oil sheen. But it’s not.”

Greenwood said scientists in the field use the “stick test” to tell if a sheen is from oil or from decayed vegetative material. “You drag a stick through it, breaking it into pieces. If the pieces don’t come back together immediately, then it’s not oil.”

If you see anything you think is an environmental concern, call the LDEQ Single Point of Contact (SPOC) number to report it. The number for the SPOC hotline is (225) 219-3640, 1-888-763-5424 toll free.

To view the Water Survey Group’s assessment, visit: <https://bit.ly/3mro6TA>.

