

Foaming seawater caused by toxins: Experts

A thick layer of froth in the seawater near New Napier Bridge has triggered concerns among visitors and environment experts, who pointed out that such foaming indicated the presence of high levels of toxins in the water.



Water foams along the beach near New Napier Bridge ; (inset) Heavy machineries dredging Chennai:

If left unchecked, it could not only affect humans but can even harm the local ecosystem, warned experts.

The foaming could be due to the high level of toxins mixing with the seawater, said Pravakar Mishra of the National Centre for Coastal Research. “High wave activity causes phosphates, like the one used in detergents, to get mixed with seawater,” Mishra said. This, he added, can activate a toxin-producing bloom.

“It is important to refrain from taking bath on the beach to avoid rashes and other skin infections as the water is contaminated,” Mishra said. The blooms are activated by the waves when the temperature is conducive for their growth. Such foaming not only affects humans, it can also cause fish to choke and die as their gills get clogged because of the sudden proliferation of the phytoplankton. While this is not an unusual phenomenon, he said that it was important to test the water to reveal the types of toxins it contains.

“We will send someone to inspect the water on Wednesday,” Mishra added.

Frothing or bloom on waterbodies are caused when the concentration of chemicals that are mixed in the water increases. The catalysts for this activity could be tidal activity and ambient temperature. Frothing is also attributed to high levels of pollution, because of the uncontrolled mixing of chemicals and letting it out into the waterbodies.

Recently, similar frothing was reported at the lake in Bengaluru, which, health experts warned, were

carcinogenic. Meanwhile, officials from the Public Works Department have commenced dredging of the estuary connecting Cooum with the sea to increase the flow of the river into the sea to avoid accumulation of contaminated water along the course of the river.

“The dredging activities are done to clear the mouth of sea sand. It is a regular activity undertaken by the PWD,” an official source said.