A DOG OWNER'S GUIDE TO 'ALGAE' IN RIVERS

WHAT IS PHORMIDIUM?

Phormidium occurs naturally in shallow rivers and looks like a blackish mat that forms on rocks. It has the potential to produce toxins and, because it is similar to algae, it is often called toxic algae. It is a form of Cyanobacteria - blue-green algae.

WHERE CAN IT BE FOUND?

It is typically found in stony rivers like the Tukituki.

IS IT HARMFUL?

Phormidium can produce toxins which can result in serious illness. Current scientific understanding is not clear about the conditions under which toxins are produced, and how this affects dogs and humans. Dog deaths have been associated with Phormidium poisoning.

HOW DO I SPOT IT?

Phormidium looks like a black, or occasionally brown, mat, and grows on the surface of stones in rivers and streams. When the river level drops, these stones can be exposed. Phormidium can also be found at the side of river in the form of detached dark mats which dry in the sun and can turn greyish in colour.

HOW TO KEEP DOGS (AND PEOPLE) SAFE

LOOK for warning signs, Facebook posts and news.
CHECK for visual signs of black, brown or grey mats in the river, exposed stones, and at the side of the river.
BE VIGILANT - don't allow dogs or children to scavenge at the water's edge if you suspect Phormidium might be present.
PREPARE by taking drinking water for your dog.
Take your dog to a VET if it appears ill after going in a river.
CHILDREN should see a doctor if they become ill.
The surface of this rock is smothered with Phormidium and green algae. Algal 'blooms' only occur with a particular combination of nutrients, temperature, sunlight and low river flows, which makes predicting blooms of these fast growing species difficult.

**SLIMY GREEN ALGAE**

These don't produce toxins but large growths can be a nuisance. If washed up or exposed, they can produce a bad smell on a hot day. They also make the riverbed slimy.

**BLACK MAT ALGAE (PHORMIDUIM)**

Under certain conditions, they have the potential to release toxins into the water at concentrations high enough to be a risk to dogs and humans.

A ‘black mat algae’ peeling off a rock. If enough of these mats collect at side of rivers, there is a risk that dogs will eat these potentially toxic organisms. Dogs are attracted by the musky smell given off as the mats decay.