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## GUEST APPEARANCE: DEC ignores toxic algae threat in Dresden

By PETER MANTIUS Feb 7, 2017



Peter Mantius is a retired journalist living in Watkins Glen.

If the Greenidge power plant in Dresden is restarted as planned this spring, it will pour tens of millions of gallons of hot water daily into Seneca Lake.

That torrent of heated water will raise the odds that toxic algae will bloom again along the lakeshore near Dresden this summer, according to several affidavits filed in January.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation is well aware that harmful algal blooms, or HABs, are a growing threat in the Finger Lakes, but it is fighting in court to suppress the affidavits.

The agency's website acknowledges that breathing or touching toxic algae can trigger nausea, vomiting, skin irritations and asthma-like breathing difficulties. Long-term exposure also increases the likelihood of liver and colorectal cancer.

According to a DEC analysis, HABs in New York state nearly tripled between 2012 and 2016, while those outbreaks with "high toxins" quadrupled.

Seneca Lake experienced several toxic blooms the past two summers. Last August, an outbreak was discovered at Perry Point, just south of the Keuka Outlet, where Greenidge's hot water would flow into the lake.

Toxic blooms are more frequent in fresh water as its temperature and nutrient levels rise, peer-reviewed scientific studies have concluded. Water flowing from the Keuka Outlet already has a relatively high nutrient load. Warming the lake water in the shallow area around Dresden is bound to add to the risk.

In an affidavit filed Jan 14, biochemist Gregory Boyer of Syracuse, a toxic algal specialist, cautioned against activities that would raise Seneca Lake water temperatures near Dresden. Doing so, he warned, could “result in increased HABs outbreaks in that area.”

That threat worries Linda Downs, whose lakefront home is about one mile north of the Keuka Outlet. In her Jan. 15 affidavit, Downs says she and her husband pump water from the lake for showering, washing dishes and brushing teeth (though not for drinking).

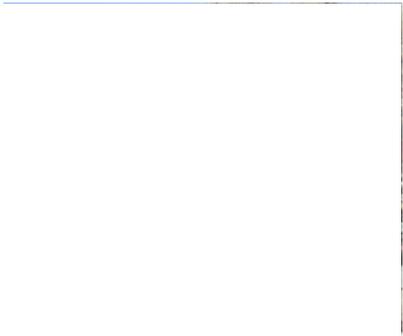
Downs notes that the DEC has proposed allowing Greenidge to discharge “up to 190 million gallons per day of condenser cooling water from the plant’s ‘once-through’ cooling system with a maximum temperature of 108F in summer and 86F in winter.”

The DEC has not yet issued modified water withdrawal and discharge permits.

But neither has it required Greenidge to use a preferred “close-cycle” water cooling system that would slash water withdrawals by 93-98 percent and proportionately reduce hot-water discharges.

In light of the obvious risks, it’s shocking that the DEC may allow Greenidge to get away with keeping a dated and environmentally harmful “once-through” cooling system.

Such a decision would go against the grain of a 2011 DEC policy statement that concluded: “The performance goal for all existing industrial facilities in New York is ‘closed-cycle’ cooling or the equivalent.”



The Dresden generating plant, built in the 1930s, operated until 2011 using coal as its fuel. New owners, Greenidge Generation LLC, seek to convert it to a 107-megawatt plant powered by natural gas. Greenidge recently<sup>33</sup> completed a 4.6-mile gas pipeline to supply the plant, which has long used the adjacent Lockwood landfill for waste.

Hoping to fast-track permits, Greenidge interests spent \$396,400 for lobbying in 2014 and 2015 and contributed another \$96,000 directly to Gov. Andrew Cuomo. Since then company has reaped a \$2 million state grant and a huge regulatory favor from the DEC.

In 2015, the agency ruled that the project did not need a full environmental impact statement, or EIS, dodging a full public airing of a variety of potential environmental issues related to hot water discharges, air quality and landfill waste.

The Sierra Club and others have sued the DEC and Greenidge, seeking a completed EIS before the plant is restarted.

In oral arguments in Penn Yan Jan. 24, lawyers for the company and the DEC urged a state Supreme Court judge to dismiss the suit. They noted that the company has spent well over \$10 million in preparation for the spring restart. The affidavits on toxic algae blooms, they argued, were filed too late and must be rejected.

If the judge agrees, the DEC has only itself to blame for the toxic outbreaks to come.

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