

NORTHPORT

Toxic algae blooms are disappearing

For the first time since 2007, Northport Harbor survived the spring and summer season without biotoxin closures due to red tide, according to Stony Brook University professor Chris Gobler.

The toxic algae have had large blooms in recent years, with Northport Harbor having the highest rate in the country, said Adrienne Esposito, co-chair of the Northport Harbor Water Quality Protection Committee.

But at a water quality meeting Monday, committee members learned that the red tide appeared to retreat in 2014. It's good news for the region's shellfish industry, which has to shut down and stop fishing in areas where the algae have taken over. Red tide contains a toxin that can be fatal for humans if they consume tainted shellfish.

In addition to his role at Stony Brook's School of Marine and Atmospheric sciences, Gobler is a member of the water committee. He has been monitoring water quality at 30 different sites on Long Island, including Northport Harbor. The sites could be ranked good, fair, or poor.

Northport's rankings usually fell in the fair category, with some poor rankings. Gobler said this was better than he expected.

One contributing factor to Northport Harbor's improved health is 2014's weather, Gobler said. Red tide thrives within a certain spectrum of temperature. The cool winter and spring delayed the algae's bloom a few months. That, along with the high summer temperatures that followed, gave the algae a smaller window in which to survive.

— VALERIE BAUMAN