

RED DRIFT ALGAE

FACT SHEET

THE BEACHES OF FORT MYERS & SANIBEL

- There are many different types of red drift algae, which primarily are found on beaches. The one that most commonly washes up on Lee County beaches, Ceramium, is a feathery, seaweed-type red algae -- or plant-like organism -- that breaks off rocks and other hard-bottom structures in the Gulf and washes ashore. In the surf, it begins to decompose, becomes surrounded by bacteria and turns the nearshore area a muddy brown.
- When red drift algae wash ashore and decay in the hot sun, a bad odor is produced.
- It's impossible to predict how long red drift algae will be present in the environment. Under normal conditions, the tides will wash any onshore algae back to sea.
- The Beaches of Fort Myers & Sanibel cleans the beaches when needed. But area leaders also are dedicated to making the beaches as natural as possible, so they try to let mother nature run her course whenever possible. Sometimes this means letting the tides wash the algae back out to sea rather than removing it immediately.
- Humans have discovered many different uses for red seaweeds. Two substances found in the cell walls of red algae are agar and carrageenan. These are gelling compounds that are used in food products and scientific research.
 - Carrageenan is an important ingredient in toothpaste and many milk products, such as ice cream and chocolate milk.
 - Agar has many scientific applications in microbiology, biotechnology and criminology; and, it is also used in the packaging of canned meats.
 - One of the most popular seaweed food products is a red seaweed called nori (Porphyra), which is used in sushi wraps and other Japanese dishes. Nori is grown in commercial seaweed farms on the east coast of North America and in Asia.

HEALTH FACTS & TIPS

- Red drift algae will not make people sick. But, if large quantities of it are on shore and decay in the hot sun, it can produce a strong odor that can irritate anyone with respiratory conditions like asthma or bronchitis.
- It is safe to be on the beach with red drift algae, but people should avoid contact with it, particularly if it has an odor that indicates it's decaying. It's best to leave any form of algae on the beach alone.
- It also is safe to swim with red drift algae. But, as with any water condition, use caution. If the algae appears to be decaying, either in the water or on land, it's best to leave it alone.

SEAFOOD SAFETY TIPS

- Only harvest shellfish from approved waters. If you are not sure if harvesting is allowed, contact the Florida Division of Aquaculture at (941) 255-7405 or on the web at http://www.floridaaquaculture.com/seas/seas_mngmt.htm
- Red drift algae does not affect fish or shellfish so it is safe to catch and eat them from waters with red drift algae. However, use caution when fishing and avoid any species that appears unhealthy.
- Fish and shellfish in area restaurants are only harvested from areas that are safe for consumption.



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