

# Groups cite algae as reason to reject 'anti-SOS' legislation

## Annual blooms dissolve, aren't harmful, developers say

By Mike Todd

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Two environmental groups on Tuesday accused the Barton Creek Properties development, whose owners are pushing state legislation to ease Austin water-pollution rules, of causing an algae bloom in the creek.

"We're going to lose Barton Creek, and if we lose Barton Creek we lose Barton Pool," environmentalist Tim Jones said during a news conference at the pool.

Barton Creek Properties manager Barry Allison called the accusation posturing aimed at the Legislature, Saturday's Austin City Council election and a city task force negotiating a development agreement.

"It (the algae bloom) is the result of politics four days before the City Council election," he said. "Sacrosanct posturing about Barton Creek is obviously a tried and true political campaign tactic."

The Save Our Springs Coalition and Save Barton Creek Association prepared a videotape showing

masses of algae in the creek starting below the Fazio golf course in the Barton Creek Properties development. The algae continues for three miles, the groups said.

Jones said he believes the algae is a result of fertilizer and treated wastewater effluent used to irrigate the golf course.

"We first noticed the algae bloom below Draw 118 about two years ago, and now we have observed that it has moved upstream," Jones said. "Obviously it's very well established."

The bloom has grown significantly since winter, he said.

Allison, however, said the algae is an annual springtime occurrence resulting from agricultural and residential fertilizing all along the creek. While it appears to be worse this year, he said, that could be because of two wet winters in a row.

"We found, as we find every year at this time, an increase in algae up and down the creek," he said. "Every agricultural user on that creek that runs cattle or grows crops fertilizes in the spring."

The blooms dissolve and cause no permanent harm, he said.

Mary Arnold, SOS Coalition director, said the news conference was aimed primarily at the Legislature. The House is considering bills that environmentalists say would weaken the SOS ordinance Austin voters enacted last August. Freeport-McMoRan Inc., owner of Barton Creek Properties, is backing some of that legislation.

"The anti-SOS forces are pushing bills through the Legislature that if passed would block SOS protection for thousands of acres of new development," Arnold said.

One bill under consideration would ensure that developments filed before SOS are permanently exempted.

"This is what could happen if we allow development to occur without the protection of SOS," Arnold said, referring to the algae.

Other legislation would forbid different water-quality standards for different parts of town. The SOS ordinance applies only to the Barton Creek area.



Helen Ballew, left, Sparky Anderson, Mary Arnold and Tim Jones view a video showing algae in Barton Creek

Staff photo by Rebecca McEntee  
Tuesday. 'We're going to lose Barton Creek,' says Jones, who blames fertilizer use for the algae growth.