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## Cleaned-up Charles can host swimmers

What dirty water?

After a scare that the Charles River would be too polluted to host its first organized swim in more than a half-century this morning, state health and environmental officials gave the waterway a clean bill of health yesterday.

"We are beyond excited," said Ulla Hester, vice president of the Charles River Swimming Club and race director. "It's been a long time coming."

Last year, the race was canceled after a potent bloom of blue-green algae, which can be toxic to humans. Race organizers moved up the swim this year to avoid a repeat, only to discover an unusually early bloom of the algae, also known as cyanobacteria, in the last week.

But cloudy, cool conditions this week slowed the algae's growth, and rain broke up the mats of cyanobacteria.

Swimming was popular in the Charles until the 1950s, when people became more aware of the dangers of industrial waste and sewage that fouled the river, inspiring the Standells to write their 1960s hit song "Dirty Water." Since then, a multimillion-dollar cleanup has restored the river.

"The race is certainly a celebration of the clean-up activities," Hester said. About 100 swimmers are signed up for the 1-mile loop that will start from an Esplanade dock at 8 this morning.

"We hope that in the long term, recreational swimming is possible," she said.

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