

新兴的生态危机——“空气富营养化”

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摘要: 存在于水生生态系统和陆地生态系统中的藻类可以通过各种自然和人为的过程溢出到大气中, 形成空气中的藻类。随着水体和陆地富营养化、空气污染、气候变暖和人造夜间灯光等各种因素的加剧, 各因素之间交互作用将可能进一步刺激空气中藻类及其毒素的繁殖和扩散, 最终形成“空气富营养化”级联效应。并且这一新兴级联效应将可能会对人类健康和生态系统构成严重威胁。

关键词: 级联效应; 空气富营养化; 空气中的藻类; 藻毒素

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随着气候变化和人类活动的不断加剧, 全球生态系统正面临着多重生态危机。更令人担忧的是各种危机往往会相互影响并产生级联效应, 进而对全球生态系统造成难以预测的后果。比如, 极端炎热干燥的气候促使非洲内陆水域中有害蓝藻过度生长, 蓝藻的肆意繁殖将产生更多藻毒素, 最终导致大量非洲大象因饮用含高浓度蓝藻毒素的水而中毒死亡^[1]。关于非洲大象大量死亡这一离奇案例, 归因于水体富营养化(aquatic eutrophication)的级联效应, 这也为新兴的与水体富营养化相关的级联效应研究提供了有力线索。团队前期研究指出, 水体富营养化可能与其他因素相互作用, 触发一种新的级联效应——“空气富营养化(air eutrophication)”效应^[2]。这一新兴级联效应不仅影响全球生态系统, 更重要的是会威胁公众健康, 为人类实现更美好、更可持续未来的蓝图带来更大的挑战。

1 空气中的藻类及其毒素对生态环境和人体健康构成潜在威胁

空气中的藻类(airborne algae)是由陆地和水体中的藻类溢出到大气中, 并能随气团远距离传播的一种生物气溶胶^[3]。与大气中的细菌或病毒相比, 空气中的藻类是空气生物学中研究最少的生物^[4]。研究表明, 空气中的藻类不仅可以通过人体呼吸藏匿于鼻孔和肺部^[5], 还能将重金属、杀虫剂等其他毒素带入人体, 严重威胁人类健康^[6-7]。同时, 空气中的藻类还参与冰核的形成, 并可通过吸收和散射太阳辐射来促进地球的辐射预算^[8]。此外, 存在于空气中的藻毒素也可能会诱发人体多种健康疾病^[9-10]。因此, 空气中的藻类及其毒素对人类健康的威胁和全球气候变化的影响不容忽视^[11]。然而, 迄今为止我们对空气中藻类及其毒素的了解仍然十分有限。

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2 “空气富营养化”的显著表征是空气中藻类的发展

富营养化最初是指水生生态系统中营养物质的过度富集,引起水生生物特别是浮游藻类增加和水环境理化性质改变的过程^[12].事实上,这是一个非常缓慢的自然过程,但随着人类活动的影响,这一过程将大大加速^[13-14].目前,富营养化已经成为一个全球性的话题,并且关于富营养化的研究不仅局限于水生生态系统,还延伸到了陆地环境^[15].然而,关于富营养化在空气中的研究关注较少.因此,本团队在经典“水体富营养化”概念基础上,首次提出不断加剧的多重生态危机之间交互作用,可能会促进空气中藻类的生长和藻类毒素的释放,从而引发与空气中藻类相关的新兴级联效应和危机——“空气富营养化”(如图 1 所示)^[2].具体而言,随着水生和陆地生态系统富营养化、空气污染、气候变暖和人造夜间灯光等生态危机的日益凸显,可能会为空气中藻类(甚至包括其他微生物)提供丰富的物种库、充足的营养源、良好的传播载体、适宜的生长温度和光照,从而导致空气中藻类(甚至包括其他微生物)及其毒素传播风险急剧上升,最终造成大气的清洁度和安全质量下降、人类的生命和健康受到威胁,我们将此现象定义为“空气富营养化”.

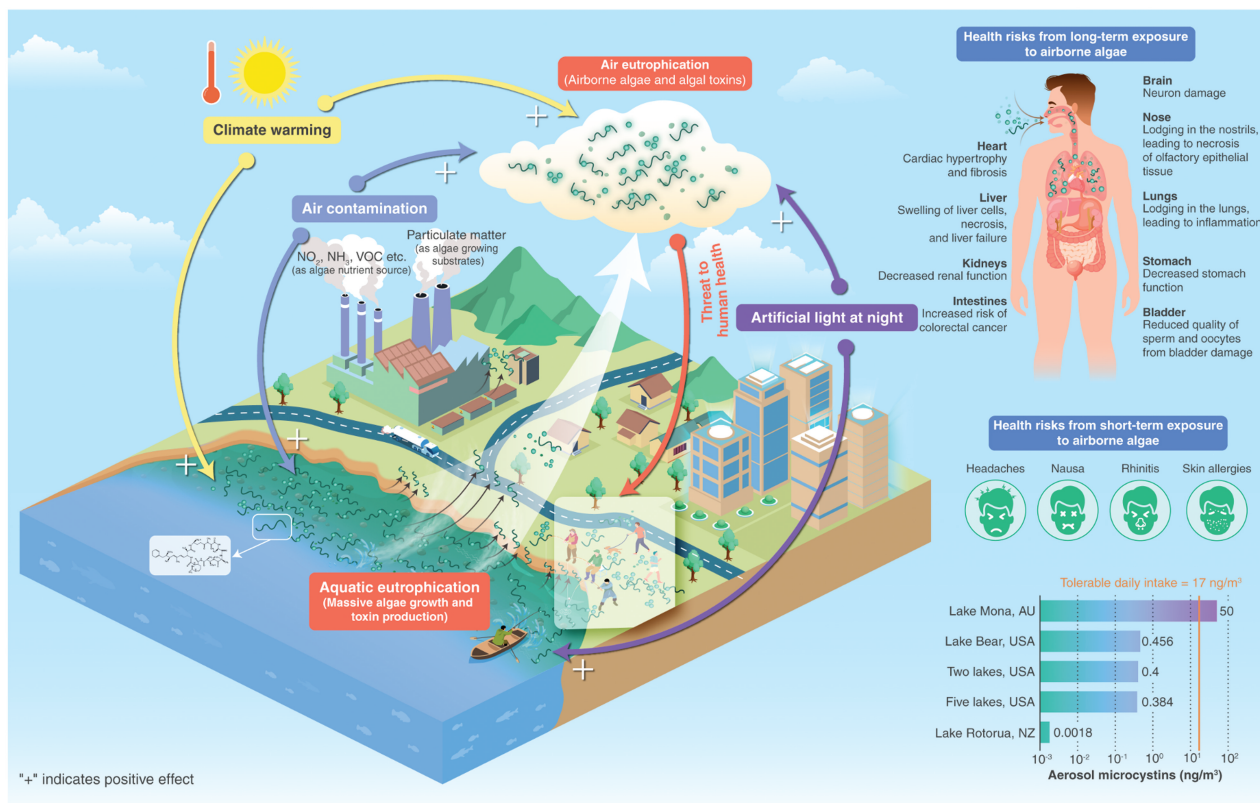


图1 影响“空气富营养化”发生的关键驱动因素及其对人类健康的潜在威胁^[2]

Fig.1 Key drivers influencing the occurrence of "air eutrophication" and their potential threat to human health^[2]

3 影响“空气富营养化”发生的几种关键驱动因素

3.1 水体和陆地生态系统富营养化是空气中藻类来源的放大器

由于空气中的藻类主要来自水体和陆地生态系统,因此这些系统中的藻类越多,也就意味着可能有更多的藻类溢出到大气中^[16].水体富营养化是全球各类水体面临的一个重大环境问题^[17-18].越来越多的证据表明,水体富营养化呈上升趋势,过量的营养物质会刺激藻类大量繁殖,严重时可形成蓝藻水华^[19-21].尤其近几十年来,藻华的多样性、频率、规模和地理范围在全球范围内都在增加^[22].水生生态系统中藻类大量繁殖为

空气中的藻类提供了充足的种源.此外,气候变化、氮沉降和施肥效应也增加了陆地生态系统富营养化的风险^[23-24].陆地生态系统的富营养化可能会为陆生藻类提供丰富的营养支持,进一步导致陆地藻类大量繁殖,而陆地藻类的大量繁殖也会大大增加空气中藻类的来源.因此,随着水体和陆地生态系统富营养化的加剧,空气中的藻类物种来源也越来越丰富.

3.2 空气污染为空气中藻类提供了良好的传播基质和营养源

空气污染作为一种外部营养源可能会促进空气中藻类的生长.随着全球人口密度的增加,空气污染已经成为一个日渐显著的环境问题^[25].作为空气污染的主要污染物,大气颗粒物主要由无机离子、含碳化合物和矿物粉尘组成^[26].这些悬浮在大气中的颗粒物不仅是空气中藻类良好的载体,而且还是空气中藻类传播的优良媒介.同时,野火产生的气溶胶沉降可促进浮游藻类大量繁殖^[27],火山熔岩携带的金属和营养物质也可刺激浮游藻类生长^[28].并且,受人类活动影响,大多数城市的二氧化氮、氨和活性挥发性有机化合物的排放量显著增加^[29].特别是农业施肥和化石燃料燃烧向大气排放的氮比陆地生态系统所有自然过程产生的氮还要多^[30].因此,空气污染将可能为空气中的藻类提供充足的附生载体和营养基质,有助于空气中藻类更好地生存和繁殖.

3.3 气候干暖化将会促进空气中藻类的生长和传播

空气中的藻类对环境条件具有较强适应力,从而显现出强大的定殖能力^[31].近年来地球气候正经历着以全球暖化为基本特征的显著变化,对生态系统的影响正在不断加剧^[32].气候变暖不仅会促进水生态系统中浮游藻类(尤其是产毒藻类)的生长和繁殖^[33-34],还会促使水生态系统中蓝藻的细胞尺寸趋于小型化^[35].尺寸较小的藻类更容易被雾化并排放到大气中,并且粒径越小的藻类在大气中传播的距离会越远^[6].另外,气候变化将加剧极端天气事件的发生,例如持续的干旱.然而,空气中的藻类在干燥条件下具有较强的耐高温能力^[36]和良好的抗紫外线能力^[37].因此,气候干暖化可能会促进更多的藻类扩散到大气中,并为空气中藻类在大气层的远距离迁移提供有利环境.

3.4 人造夜间灯光为空气中藻类生长供给了额外光源

光是初级生产者进行光合作用及其相关过程的关键因素.城市化进程的加快促使人造夜间灯光的空间迅速扩大,2012年至2016年间,地球的人造夜间灯光户外面积每年增长2.2%^[38].人造夜间灯光已被证明会扰乱人类和其他动物的睡眠^[39],造成海洋生态系统的光污染^[40],改变叶片的生理或化学性质^[41],影响附生藻类的群落组成^[42].并且,不同波长和强度的人造夜间灯光对藻类的生物量和多样性有不同的影响,尤其红光和绿光能增加藻类的生物量^[43].因此,人造夜间灯光也将为空气中藻类的生长提供额外的光源,以促进其光合作用、改变其物种多样性和生物量.

4 结论和展望

气候变化和人类活动对生态系统产生的影响正在引发一系列的级联效应.为实现人与自然的和谐共存,我们必须更深入地理解大自然中发生的各种复杂关系,主动掌握应对多种风险的策略.因此,“空气富营养化”作为一种新兴级联效应和新领域,亟须多学科的合力关注和深入探究.

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The emerging ecological crisis: "air eutrophication"

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Abstract: The presence of algae in aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems can spill over into the atmosphere through a variety of natural and anthropogenic processes to form airborne algae. As factors such as aquatic and terrestrial eutrophication, air contamination, climate warming and artificial light at night intensify increase, the interactions between these factors may further stimulate the growth and spread of airborne algae and their toxins, ultimately leading to a cascading effect of "air eutrophication". And this new emerging cascading effect will likely pose a serious threat to human health and ecosystems.

Keywords: cascading effect; air eutrophication; airborne algae; algal toxin

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