



S.D. BEACH WATER QUALITY SLIGHTLY IMPACTED BY ABOVE AVERAGE RAINFALL

97% of beaches get A or B grades in summer; sewage spills still sore spot

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 26, 2016) – As Southern California continues to wrestle with historic drought, San Diego was the only county to exceed its 10-year rain-average. As such, top-tier grades at San Diego beaches were slightly impacted this past year.

Water quality remained in the excellent to very good range at the vast majority of beaches in San Diego County last year, according to Heal the Bay's 26th annual Beach Report Card, which the environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 72 beaches tracked along the San Diego County coast this past summer season, based on levels of bacterial pollution in the water. The county notched 62 A grades and eight B grades during dry weather in the peak beachgoing period (April through October), representing 97% of beaches monitored. While the 97% A and B grades were on par with the five-year average of 98%, the 86% A grades this year were lower than the 95% five-year average.

Only two beaches in San Diego County scored below a B grade: Mission Bay at Comfort Station (D grade) and San Diego Bay at Shelter Island (failing grade).

Shelter Island has the dubious honor of the No. 3 slot in Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer List, which ranks the most polluted beaches in the state. Like many enclosed beaches, this bayside site suffers from poor water circulation. Shallow and still water provide a hotbed for bacterial pollution.

In another disturbing note, the county reported 22 sewage spills from April 2015 to March 2016, with four of them deemed "major" (totaling more than 10,000 gallons). Outflows from the Tijuana River led to 21 separate closure events at border beaches, while other spills led to three beach closures in the Coronado area, two in Mission Bay, and one at Point Loma.

On a more positive note, Heal the Bay placed 14 beaches in San Diego on its Honor Roll, a highly selective list of beaches statewide that were monitored year-round and scored perfect A-plus grades during the entire reporting period. San Diego had more beaches on the Honor Roll than any other county.

Wet weather water quality this past year was on par with the county's five-year average, with 77% A or B grades. These figures should be somewhat reassuring to the county's significant contingent of surfers, paddleboarders, divers, and other year-round ocean users.

Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades, based on the latest samples, each week at www.beachreportcard.org.

"A day at the beach should never make anyone sick," said Leslie Griffin, Heal the Bay's chief water quality scientist and co-author of the report. "The reassuring news is that if you swim during the summer at an open-ocean beach in San Diego you statistically have very little risk of getting ill."

For a detailed look at beach results for each county and report methodology, please refer to our complete report. A PDF version is available at www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay to forecast water quality

This summer Heal the Bay, Stanford University, and UCLA will expand their pilot program to test the effectiveness of new predictive beach water quality tools. Using sophisticated statistical models, environmental data, and past bacteria samples, the scientific teams are aiming to accurately predict when beaches should be posted with warning or open signs.

Promising early results last year at three pilot beaches (Arroyo Burro Beach, Santa Monica Pier Beach, and Doheny Beach) indicated that agencies may be able to post a warning notice immediately at pollution-impacted beaches rather than waiting one to two days for bacteria testing. These new models will protect public health by providing more timely and advanced water quality information to public health officials. This summer, Heal the Bay will add two more beaches to the predictive modeling program – East Beach in Santa Barbara and Belmont Pier in Long Beach.

About the Beach Report Card

The Beach Report Card is a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on daily and weekly samples taken from sites along the entire coast of California. A poor grade means beachgoers face a higher risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections and skin rashes than swimmers at cleaner beaches.

All county health departments in California are required to test beach water quality samples for three types of indicator bacteria at least once a week during the summer season. Many counties also monitor heavily used beaches year-round. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it, and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October 2015), winter dry weather (November 2015 through March 2016) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

A FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates, as well as historical grades can be found at www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of SIMA and the Swain Barber Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 31st year, Heal the Bay is dedicated to making Santa Monica Bay and Southern California watersheds and coastal waters safe and healthy for people and marine life. It is one of the largest nonprofit environmental organizations in Los Angeles County, with more than 15,000 members.

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