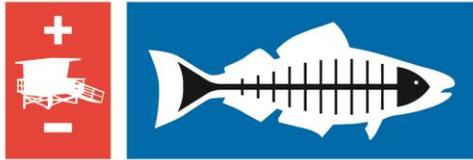


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SUMMER WATER QUALITY AT L.A. BEACHES ON RISE

83% gets A or B grade; Avalon, Malibu beaches top Heal the Bay's Bummer List

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 24, 2012) –Summertime beach water quality in Los Angeles County is showing marked improvement, according to Heal the Bay's 22nd annual Beach Report Card, which the environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 91 beaches in the county for the dry-weather period from April to October 2011, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 82% of sites earned A or B grades, compared to a 75% tally in last year's report. The 82% figure is seven percentage points better than the county's five-year summertime average. (Year-round grades and other details can be found in the full report.)

The improvement during all three phases of the study's 2011-12 reporting period can be attributed to a number of factors, most notably ongoing infrastructure improvements aimed at curbing bacterial pollution.

The city of Long Beach, which has suffered years of poor water quality because it sits at the terminus of the impaired Los Angeles River, has undertaken a number of sewer repair, storm drain diversion and disinfection projects. Long Beach's water quality has improved drastically, recording 93% A and B grades during summer dry weather, compared to 27% in the previous report.

Still, the 82% figure for L.A. beaches receiving A or B grade is well below the statewide average of 92%. Despite significant improvements over the course of two decades, Los Angeles County continues to have the greatest number of beaches with poor water quality grades of any county in the state.

"We are heartened by numerous individual beach success stories, but this year highlighted that there is still a long way to go in addressing stormwater pollution," said Kirsten James, Heal the Bay's director of water quality. "Locally Heal the Bay will be focusing efforts on advocating for a strong municipal stormwater permit to address this critical beach water quality issue."

The county also has the dubious distinction of being home to seven of the 10 beaches listed on Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer list, which ranks the most polluted beaches in the state. Avalon Beach in Catalina tops this year's list.

The Beach Report Card is a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on daily and weekly samples taken from sites along the entire U.S. Pacific Coast. 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.

Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades each week at www.beachreportcard.org, based on the latest samples. Before heading to the shore, visitors can also access the latest-water grades on the go by downloading Heal the Bay's free app for mobile devices.

A handful of significantly polluted beaches helped drag down the county's overall grades, most notably in Malibu. The city claimed four of the 10 spots on the Beach Bummer list: Puerco Beach, Dan Blocker, Surfrider and Escondido. (It is worth noting that these beaches sit adjacent to developed areas with no sewer infrastructure.)

In all, 11 beaches in Los Angeles County received F grades for the summer reporting period, up from last year's nine.

Avalon Beach in Catalina reigns as the most polluted beach in the state, largely because of outdated and leaking sewer lines. However, the city of Avalon has granted \$5.1 million toward sewer improvements. The Regional Water Quality Control also has put the city under increased scrutiny, issuing a Cease and Desist Order for illegally discharging polluted water. After years of delay, city leaders are now taking the necessary steps to curb pollution at the Avalon Harbor shoreline.

Other county sites on the state's top 10 Beach Bummer list: Topanga State Beach and Cabrillo Beach (harborside) in San Pedro.

On the positive side, six beaches in Los Angeles County were placed on Heal the Bay's Honor Roll, meaning they scored perfect A or A+ grades every week of the report's three time periods.

Also, the city of Los Angeles this year completed the last phase of a \$40+ million year-round dry weather runoff diversion project. Runoff from eight historically impacted storm drains is now funneled into sewers that flow to the Hyperion Treatment Plant, rather than flowing directly into the ocean. All eight beaches near these diversion projects received A or B grades this year during both summer and winter dry weather, a very significant improvement.

Wet weather water quality in Los Angeles County showed poor results overall, with only 29 of 86 (34%) receiving A or B grades, though slightly improved compared to 29% last year. Some 42 out of 86 (49%) of sample sites earned an F grade. Los Angeles wet weather water quality remained well below the statewide average of 64% A or B grades.

Cities continue to grapple with stormwater runoff and the harmful effects it has on year-round ocean users. Heal the Bay recommends that no one swim in the ocean during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm.

Meanwhile, Orange County beaches once again recorded excellent water quality grades, well above the state average. Some 95 of 101 locations monitored during dry summer weather received an A or B grade, just slightly lower than in last year's report.

Despite the generally excellent water quality, Orange County has two historically troubled locales on the Top 10 Beach Bummer List: Poche Beach and Doheny Beach at San Juan Creek.

Despite the construction of a runoff treatment facility at Poche Beach, state standards of indicator bacteria continued to be exceeded regularly, resulting in numerous postings last year. However, pond outlet bacteria concentrations were reduced greatly in 2011. County officials continue an ongoing effort to improve surfzone water quality, and are actively working to identify lingering causes of pollution.

Wet weather water quality in Orange County this past year was poor with only 69% of monitoring locations receiving A or B grades. Polluted runoff during the rainy season continues to pose a health threat to Southern California's sizable population of year-round surfers.

Ventura County also enjoyed excellent water quality in the summertime reporting period. All of the 40 beaches monitored during dry weather received A grades. There were no F grades during any of the three reporting periods of the year. The only source of concern is a D grade in wet weather in Hobie Beach.

One of the reasons that Los Angeles County scores lower in water quality is the fact that its monitoring agencies – unlike most others in the state -- collect samples directly in front of flowing stormdrains and creeks. Orange and Ventura counties monitor 25 yards or more away from flowing drains and creeks.

Monitoring at “point zero” locations, where polluted runoff often pools or meets the ocean, is the best way to ensure that health risks to swimmers are captured in water quality data.

State results

Statewide, most California beaches had very good to excellent water quality this past year during summer dry weather, with 407 of 441 (92%) locations receiving A and B grades. That marks a 2% improvement from the previous report.

Overall, 34 of the beaches (8%) monitored statewide received C, D or F grades during summer dry weather. Some 19 beaches statewide received an overall F grade during the busy summer beachgoing season, up from last year’s 18.

Numerous California beaches vied for the “Beach Bummers” crown this year. Seven of the 10 most polluted beaches in the state this past year were in Los Angeles County.

Top 10 California Beach Bummers

1. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)*
2. *Cowell Beach (Santa Cruz County)*
3. *Puerco Beach at the Marie Canyon storm drain (Los Angeles County)*
4. *Surfrider Beach (Los Angeles County)*
5. *Dan Blocker County Beach at Solstice Creek (Los Angeles County)*
6. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
7. *Doheny State Beach at San Juan Creek outlet (Orange County)*
8. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
9. *Escondido State Beach (Los Angeles County)*
10. *Topanga Beach (Los Angeles County)*

Uncertain Funding for Beach Monitoring

County monitoring agencies statewide continue to feel the effects of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s 2008 line-item veto of state beach monitoring funds. The governor axed funds that supported the collection and processing of ocean water samples as well as the posting of signs to notify swimmers of health risks.

In response, the State Regional Water Quality Control Board now has the discretion to allocate fees up to \$1.8 million towards beach water quality monitoring. This year, the state only approved \$1 million to fund the entire beach monitoring program. The shortfall will seriously affect the number and frequency of sites tracked throughout the year.

To safeguard the health of beachgoers, Heal the Bay makes the following recommendations to state and national beach water quality regulators. Details in report.

- Strengthen the EPA’s soon-to-be revised beach water quality criteria, not weaken them.
- Implement year-round monitoring of popular beaches statewide
- Incorporate numeric pollution limits in all stormwater permits
- Adopt statewide regulations of septic systems, which can leak bacteria into receiving waters.

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.

About the Beach Report Card

All county health departments are required to test beach water quality samples for three types of indicator bacteria at least once a week during the summer season. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade. We analyzed 650 beaches in California, Oregon and Washington based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2011 through March 2012.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October), winter dry weather (November 2011 through March 2012) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Heal the Bay’s interactive microsite contains an FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates as well as historical grades. www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay’s Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of The Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation, simplehuman, LAcAR GUY, SIMA, and Grousbeck Family Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 27th year, Heal the Bay makes 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 13,000 members.

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