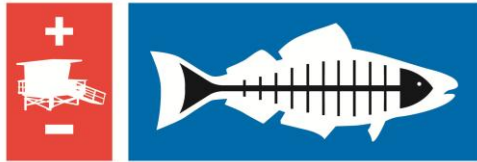


BEACH REPORT CARD



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S.D. BEACHES MAINTAIN VERY GOOD WATER QUALITY *93% get 'A' grades in summer; chronic sewage spills, border plumes still worrying*

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Thursday, May 24, 2012) – Ocean lovers in San Diego County continue to enjoy excellent beach water quality during the high-traffic summer season, according to Heal the Bay's 22nd annual Beach Report Card, which the Santa Monica-based environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 69 beaches tracked along the San Diego coast from April to October 2011, based on levels of bacterial pollution in the water. Some 93% of county sites received A grades for the period, dipping slightly from last year's 95%. For comparison's sake, only 81% of all 441 California beaches monitored during the summer season received top marks.

San Diego's impressive grades for summer 2011 are slightly above the county's five-year average, in which 91% of beaches monitored in dry weather earned A grades. Only two beaches received C grades for the summer, with no D or F grades given to any site. (Year-round grades and other details can be found in the full report.)

San Diego County's water quality during the winter dry weather was also excellent with 93% of the monitored locations notching A or B grades. However, only 41 of 69 locations were sampled during the winter compared to the summer.

But there's bad news for local beachgoers to be found in the report as well.

Following a troubling year-on-year pattern, San Diego County suffered numerous beach closures in 2011-12 due to a series of sewage spills. San Diego once again is the California county with the largest volume of pollution spills reported statewide during the study period. Some 11 different spills spewed more than 2.3 million gallons of waste into receiving waters.

And ongoing sewage-contaminated plumes flowing north from the Tijuana Estuary continue to plague Imperial Beach sites. Over the reporting period, the four southernmost beaches in San Diego County were closed 13 different times as a precaution to keep oceangoers away from contaminated plumes.

"The good news is that San Diego's beaches are staying really clean during the summer, when most people are in the water. But we are concerned with the number of sewage spills in the area; this year San Diego had more than twice as many known spills as any other California county," said James Alamillo, Urban Programs Manager at Heal the Bay.

"Of particular concern this year is President Obama's proposed budget, which would eliminate the federal BEACH Act Grant Program," Alamillo added. "This roughly \$10 million of federal funding allows states to monitor water quality. And since states are not required to monitor water quality unless federal funding is available, the elimination of these funds would mean that many states' water quality monitoring programs will be scaled back or even ended."

The county's biggest challenge continues to be during wet weather, with 19% of monitored beaches receiving F grades. These eight beaches are likely impacted by urban runoff, which carries bacteria and other pollution from the streets to the sea after rainfall.

On a more positive note, 21 beaches in the county were placed on Heal the Bay's Honor Roll, meaning they scored perfect A or A+ grades every week of the year, regardless of dry or rainy conditions.

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.

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 sea, visitors can also access the latest grades on the go by downloading Heal the Bay's free app for mobile devices.

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 14.

Los Angeles County still has more beaches with poor water quality grades than any other county in the state (only 81% A or B grades.)

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)*

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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Partners: Several statewide coastal environmental groups have consulted with Heal the Bay about regional water quality issues. The following leaders are available to provide further local perspective.

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