



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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Santa Monica Pier Ranks Among California’s Most Polluted Beaches for 5th Consecutive Year in Heal the Bay’s 2025–2026 Beach Report Card

New statewide reports reveal how rainfall, urban runoff, and chronic pollution continue to impact water quality across California’s beaches and Los Angeles rivers, posing ongoing risks ahead of Memorial Day weekend.

LOS ANGELES — Ahead of Memorial Day weekend, Heal the Bay has released its 2025–2026 Beach Report Card and 2025 River Report Card, annual analyses tracking bacterial pollution at beaches, rivers, streams, and lakes across California and Los Angeles County.

For the 5th consecutive year, the Santa Monica Pier has ranked among California’s most polluted beaches during dry weather conditions, highlighting persistent water quality challenges at one of the state’s most visited coastal destinations.

Despite years of investment and remediation efforts, elevated bacteria levels continue to pose a direct public health risk for millions of beachgoers.

The annual reports also reveal broader statewide water quality trends tied to increased rainfall, urban runoff, aging stormwater infrastructure, and persistent pollution hotspots across both coastal and freshwater recreation areas.

Heal the Bay’s 2025 River Report Card similarly identifies recurring freshwater pollution hotspots concentrated in urbanized sections of the Los Angeles River watershed.

“No one should get sick from a weekend in our waters,” said Heal the Bay CEO Tracy Quinn. “These findings are a reminder that water quality isn’t just a report, it’s a public health issue that affects every beachgoer and river user across California.”

Water quality remains safe overall, but variability is increasing

Results show California's water quality remained generally strong last year, but wetter conditions and urban runoff led to slight statewide declines compared to the previous dry year.

A single exposure to bacteria-contaminated water can lead to illness, including rashes, ear infections, respiratory issues, and gastrointestinal symptoms.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card and River Report Card translate complex water quality data into simple, easy-to-understand A–F grades that help the public understand when and where it is safe to recreate.

The Beach Report Card evaluates fecal indicator bacteria levels at hundreds of beaches across the West Coast, from Washington State to Baja California. The River Report Card extends this approach to 35 freshwater recreation sites across Los Angeles County.

Weekly water quality grades are available year-round on the Beach Report Card app and website, and during the summer recreation season on the River Report Card website.

Three key statewide trends

1. Wetter conditions and urban runoff drove slight declines statewide.

The Beach Report Card found 91% of California beaches still earned A or B grades during summer dry conditions. However, wet weather grades declined statewide, dropping from 67% to 61% during storms.

The River Report Card showed similar declines in urban-influenced sections of Los Angeles County, where higher bacteria levels were observed more consistently this year.

2. Where You Are Still Determines Water Quality.

While some Northern California areas saw water quality improvements, Southern California saw some of the largest winter and wet weather declines this year, as stormwater runoff carried more pollution into beaches and waterways.

Freshwater quality remains strongest in upper watershed areas surrounded by natural landscapes, and declines as waterways move through more developed regions. Conditions are consistently most impaired in heavily urbanized downstream reaches such as the Lower L.A. River.

In upper watershed areas, where land use transitions from open space to urban zones, scientists also observed greater short-term variability this year, likely linked to episodic urban runoff and possible localized post-fire impacts from the January 2025 Eaton Fire.

3. Persistent Hotspots Reflect Long-Term Infrastructure Gaps

Many pollution hotspots identified in previous years reappeared, underscoring ongoing challenges tied to stormwater runoff, stagnant circulation, and aging wastewater infrastructure.

Santa Monica Pier, storm-impacted beaches, and chronic pollution sites remain key concerns

The Beach Report Card's annual Beach Bummer list identifies the ten beaches with the poorest Summer Dry grades.

Six of the ten Beach Bummer sites were in San Mateo County many located in enclosed harbor and lagoon systems where limited circulation contributes to chronic bacteria pollution.

Playa Blanca and the Tijuana Slough at the Tijuana River Mouth remain heavily impacted by transboundary wastewater flows from Baja California. Efforts are underway on both sides of the border to reduce sewage inputs and improve wastewater infrastructure.

Heal the Bay is actively investigating pollution sources near the Pier through its Santa Monica Pier Task Force, in partnership with the City of Santa Monica, to identify long-term solutions.

Freshwater pollution remains concentrated in urban downstream areas

The River Report Card identifies recurring pollution hotspots concentrated in urbanized downstream sections of the Los Angeles River watershed.

As watersheds move from open space into developed areas, water quality becomes more variable and declines. Downstream reaches consistently show elevated bacteria levels driven by surrounding development and polluted runoff.

Despite these challenges, some beaches and rivers continue to perform at the highest level.

Despite statewide challenges, 21 beaches earned Beach Report Card Honor Roll status, meaning they received A+ grades across all monitored conditions.

The River Report Card Honor Roll similarly recognizes freshwater recreation sites with consistently excellent water quality and bacteria levels well below public health thresholds, most of which are located in upper watershed areas with minimal development.

The Grades

2025-26 BRC Beach Bumpers: The beaches that received the ten poorest Summer Dry Grades are Beach Bumpers. The #1 ranking indicates the beach with the worst grade based on bacteria levels during summer dry weather.

Rank	Beach Name	County/Area	Beach Type
1	Playa Blanca	Tijuana	Storm drain impacted*
2	Santa Monica Pier	Los Angeles	Storm drain impacted
3	Erckenbrack Park	San Mateo	Enclosed
4	Linda Mar Beach at San Pedro Creek	San Mateo	Storm drain impacted
5	Parkside Aquatic Park	San Mateo	Enclosed
6	Pillar Point Harbor, Capistrano Road Beach	San Mateo	Enclosed
7	Pillar Point Harbor, Harbor Beach	San Mateo	Enclosed
8	Marlin Park	San Mateo	Enclosed
9	Tijuana Slough at Tijuana River Mouth	San Diego	Storm drain impacted
10	Clam Beach County Park at Strawberry Creek	Humboldt	Storm drain impacted

2025-26 BRC Honor Roll: To earn a spot on the Honor Roll, a beach must be monitored weekly throughout the year and receive an A+ grade in all conditions: Summer Dry, Winter Dry, and Wet Weather. This year, 21 beaches earned a spot on the Honor Roll, a notable decrease from the 62 beaches last year.

Beach Name	County
Bluff Cove, Palos Verdes Estates	Los Angeles
Huntington Harbour, Admiralty Dr. Beach	Orange
Huntington Harbor, Coral Cay Beach	Orange
Dana Point Harbor, guest dock	Orange
Capistrano County Beach, South Capistrano Bay	Orange
Huntington City Beach at Beach Blvd.	Orange
Laguna Beach, Three Arch Bay	Orange
Laguna Beach, 1000 Steps Beach at 9th St.	Orange
Sunset Beach at Broadway	Orange
Encinitas, San Elijo State Park, Pipes surf break	San Diego
Carlsbad at Poinsettia Ln.	San Diego
Carlsbad at Palomar Airport Rd.	San Diego

Carlsbad at Cerezo Dr.	San Diego
Point Loma, Lighthouse	San Diego
Point Loma, Point Loma Treatment Plant	San Diego
Sunset Cliffs at Ladera St.	San Diego
Mission Beach, Belmont Park	San Diego
Solana Beach, Tide Beach Park at Solana Vista Dr.	San Diego
Cardiff State Beach, Seaside State Park	San Diego
Encinitas, San Elijo State Park at Liverpool Dr.	San Diego
Guadalupe Dunes	Santa Barbara

2025 RRC Freshwater Fails: The Freshwater Fails List ranks the sites with F annual grades, with the first ranking indicating the worst water quality.

- #1 (tie) L.A. River below Rio Hondo Confluence (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #1 (tie) L.A. River at Hollydale Park (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #2 L.A. River below Compton Creek Confluence (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #3 L.A. River at Willow Street (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #4 Eaton Wash at Sierra Madre Boulevard (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #5 (tie) Santa Anita Wash at Colorado Boulevard (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #5 (tie) L.A. River at Riverfront Park (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #6 Compton Creek (Lower L.A. River Watershed)
- #7 Tujunga Wash at Hansen Dam (L.A. River Watershed-Recreation Zones)
- #8 Arroyo Seco at Brookside Golf Course (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- #9 Bull Creek (Upper L.A. River Watershed)

2025 RRC Honor Roll: The Honor Roll List reflects sites with A+ annual grades, proving excellent water quality and bacteria levels consistently well below health standards, posing the lowest risk of illness.

- Malibu Creek at Rock Pool (Malibu Creek Watershed)
- East Fork at Cattle Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- East Fork at Graveyard Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper Cattle Canyon (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper East Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper North Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Upper West Fork (Upper San Gabriel River Watershed)
- Gould Mesa Creek (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- Switzer Falls (Upper L.A. River Watershed)
- Big Tujunga at Vogel Flats (Upper L.A. River Watershed)

How to stay safe around beaches and rivers

Heal the Bay recommends the following precautions before entering recreational waters:

- Avoid swimming within 72 hours after rainfall
- Stay away from storm drains, river outlets, and enclosed stagnant waters
- Always check current water quality conditions before recreating

Why these reports matter

For more than 36 years, Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card has helped translate bacterial monitoring data into accessible public health information across the West Coast.

The River Report Card, launched in 2017, extends this approach to freshwater recreation areas across Los Angeles County, filling a long-standing gap in routine monitoring for rivers and streams used for recreation.

Together, these programs make water quality data accessible, consistent, and actionable, empowering the public to make informed decisions about where and when it is safe to recreate.

As climate change intensifies rainfall extremes, wildfire impacts, and urban runoff pressures, sustained investment in water infrastructure and access to clear, reliable public health information, will only become more critical. Beachgoers are encouraged to check current conditions before heading to the water at beachreportcard.org or through the Beach Report Card app

About Heal the Bay

Heal the Bay is an environmental nonprofit dedicated to making coastal waters and inland watersheds of greater Los Angeles safe, healthy, and clean. Founded in 1985, the organization uses science, community action, education, and advocacy to advance its mission. Volunteers have removed nearly 4 million pieces of plastic trash from California coastlines over the past four decades.

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