



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Heal the Bay's 18th Annual Beach Report CardSM provides water quality information to the millions of people who swim, surf, or dive in California coastal waters. Essential reading for ocean users, the report card grades more than 375 locations year-round (517 locations in dry weather from April to October) on an A to F scale based on the risk of adverse health effects to beachgoers. The grades are based on daily and weekly fecal bacteria pollution levels in the surfzone. The program has evolved from an annual review of beaches in Santa Monica Bay to weekly updates of all monitored beaches throughout California. All of this information is available in print, via SMS text response, and on Heal the Bay's website, www.healthebay.org.

The 2007-2008 Annual Beach Report Card showed the best overall water quality on record. Most California beaches had very good water quality, with 330 of 379 (87%) locations receiving very good-to-excellent (A and B) grades for the year during dry weather. The remaining grades were 20 Cs (5%), 5 Ds (1%) and 24 Fs (6%). Southern California (Santa Barbara through San Diego) dry weather grades (87% As and Bs) were similar to the statewide average for the first time in three years. This is most likely due to the historic drought experienced during the winter of 2006-2007 in Southern California. Los Angeles County still had the state's lowest grades in the state with only 71% As and Bs, but that tally marks a solid improvement from last year's grades. Despite moderate improvement in Long Beach overall, water quality at monitoring locations nearest the Los Angeles River outlet continued to suffer from very poor water quality this year.



Santa Monica Beach at Pico/Kenter

“point zero” – the mouth of stormdrains or creeks – is the best way to ensure that the health risks to swimmers are captured in the data.

One of the reasons that Los Angeles County had the worst water quality grades in California is that the county is one of the first in the state (along with Humboldt County and portions of San Diego) to modify its monitoring program to collect samples directly in front of flowing stormdrains and creeks. This change was a result of the Santa Monica Bay beach bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load requirements. (TMDLs are water body specific standards.) Children play directly in front of stormdrains, and in the runoff-filled ponds and lagoons. Monitoring at

This is one recommendation among several others that Heal the Bay has made to state officials to improve water quality monitoring and protect public health. A complete list of recommendations can be found at the end of this document.



This year, Heal the Bay is pleased to include water quality data for monitoring locations in both Contra Costa and Alameda counties. Three locations at Keller Beach in Contra Costa and five locations at Crown Beach in Alameda County were monitored frequently enough to earn grades for all time periods this past year. Alameda Point data has also been recently made available, and grades for the two Alameda Point monitoring locations will most likely appear in this year's End of Summer Report. Heal the Bay would like to thank the East Bay Regional Park District for providing Contra Costa and Alameda data for analysis, as well as Save the Bay for providing contact information enabling data acquisition. San Mateo bayside locations also make their debut in this report. For the first time in Beach Report Card history, Heal the Bay has included all San Francisco Bay monitoring locations from five of the surrounding counties (Marin, Contra Costa, Alameda, San Mateo, and San Francisco).

There continues to be a great disparity between dry and wet weather water quality. This year (April 2007 – March 2008) 46% of the 379 locations monitored during wet weather received fair-to-poor (C – F) grades. In Southern California, 52% of sampling locations earned fair-to-poor wet weather grades – slightly higher than the statewide average. Despite the fact that many counties had record excellent water quality during dry weather, wet weather grades were below the four-year average for southern California. In other words, cities and counties are starting to effectively tackle dry weather beach pollution, but stormwater runoff continues to wreak havoc on coastal water quality during the winter.



Avalon Beach, Catalina

Numerous California beaches vied for the “Beach Bummers” crown this year (the monitoring location with the poorest dry weather water quality). Five of the ten most polluted beach areas in the state were in LA County.

The Top 10 Beach Bummers

1. Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)
2. Santa Monica Municipal Pier (Los Angeles County)
3. Poche Beach (Orange County)
4. North Beach Doheny (Orange County)
5. Marie Canyon Drain at Puerco Beach (Los Angeles County)
6. Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)
7. City of Long Beach – multiple locations (Los Angeles County)
8. Campbell Cove State Park Beach (Sonoma County)
9. Clam Beach County Park near Strawberry Creek (Humboldt County)
10. Pismo Beach Pier (San Luis Obispo County)



Heal the Bay completed an analysis of data from Santa Barbara County through San Diego County to determine whether there were significant differences in water quality based on beach type. As in previous years, water quality at open ocean beaches during year-round dry weather was significantly better than water quality at those beaches located within enclosed bays or harbors, or those impacted by stormdrains. 95% of open ocean beaches received an A grade for year-round dry weather compared to 80% at beaches found within an enclosed bay, harbor or marina, and 75% at beaches impacted by a stormdrain. The data demonstrate that visitors at open ocean beaches with no pollution source nearly always swim in clean water during dry weather.



Santa Monica Canyon

at point zero, while other counties are measuring at 25, 50 or 83 yards from the storm drain. This discrepancy makes it difficult to compare certain beaches and is not the most protective measure for public health. Further efforts will be made this year to unite all stakeholders in the monitoring process. Heal the Bay will work to implement a standardized monitoring plan that can be applied statewide to allow more accurate comparison of beach water quality and improve public health protection.

Santa Monica Bay TMDL

Every beach from the Ventura County line south to Palos Verdes was mandated to meet state beach bacteria health standards 100% of the time during the AB411 time period by July 15, 2006 or face penalties. Marina del Rey's Mother's Beach and Back Basins had a compliance deadline of March 18, 2007. The 100% compliance requirement for the AB411 time period (from April 1st to October 31st) means that all Santa Monica Bay beaches must be safe for swimming every day

Standardized Monitoring

There is currently no standardized beach water quality monitoring in California. Most counties and cities each monitor for fecal indicator bacteria using plans that have been developed without collaboration with other regions. Approximately five years ago, Heal the Bay teamed up with the Southern California Beach Water Quality Workgroup to formulate a standardized monitoring plan. This plan would require counties to each monitor at a certain depth and distance from a storm drain and ensure the appropriate posting of warning signs to the public. A number of these measures were incorporated into health department monitoring plans. But there were still huge disparities among counties with regards to the distance at which their samples were taken from a storm drain.

Some counties, such as Los Angeles, measure



for the seven months from April through October. These requirements were in the fecal bacteria Total Maximum Daily Loads for Santa Monica Bay and Mother's Beach.

Unfortunately, the compliance deadlines came and went, and many of Santa Monica Bay's beaches, namely, Surfrider Beach, Santa Monica Pier, Mother's Beach, Dockweiler State Beach at Ballona Creek mouth, Marie Canyon, Santa Monica Beach at Pico/Kenter and the Redondo Pier still had elevated bacteria levels above the TMDL limits. In order for the Bacteria TMDL pollution limits to be readily enforceable, the Regional Water Quality Control Board incorporated them into the language of the L.A. County Storm Water Permit on September 14, 2006 and August 9, 2007. Cities and other dischargers are now subject to fines of over \$10,000 per day per violation.



Santa Monica Beach at Arizona

On March 4, 2008, in a precedent-setting move, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board sent strongly worded notices of violation and section 13383 Orders to 20 cities and Los Angeles County to clean up Santa Monica Bay beaches. The cities of Santa Monica, Los Angeles, and Malibu are among those threatened with fines of up to \$10,000 per day per violation. The action marks the first time nationally that a regulatory body has threatened fines to ensure cities' compliance with beach bacteria limits from a TMDL.

Sixteen cities and the County have petitioned the State Water Resources Control Board to review the 13383 Orders. These cities are holding the petitions in abeyance, and the County has requested a review.

While some cities have made noticeable improvements in identifying and rectifying sources of ocean pollution, measures to fix chronically polluted beaches like Dockweiler State Beach at Ballona Creek mouth and Surfrider have been inadequate. Instead of challenging potential heavy fines for each bacteria limit violation, we are hopeful that the cities and Los Angeles County will take appropriate aggressive actions to ensure that bacteria limits are not exceeded and that Santa Monica Bay beaches are safe for beach-goers in the summer months. The Beach Report Card will continue to identify beaches that exceed bacteria limits and track compliance efforts.

The Beach Report Card is based on the routine monitoring of beaches conducted by local health



agencies and dischargers. Water samples are analyzed for bacteria that indicate pollution from numerous sources, including fecal waste. The better the grade a beach receives, the lower the risk of illness to ocean users. The report is not designed to measure the amount of trash or toxins found at beaches. The Beach Report Card would not be possible without the cooperation of all of the shoreline monitoring agencies in the state.



Dockweiler State Beach at Ballona Creek

County health officials and Heal the Bay recommend that beach users never swim within 100 yards of any flowing stormdrain, or in any coastal water during a rainstorm, and for at least three days after a storm has ended. Stormdrain runoff is the greatest source of pollution to local beaches, flowing untreated to the coast and often contaminated with motor oil, animal waste, pesticides, yard waste and trash. After a rain, indicator bacteria densities usually far exceed state health criteria for recreational water use.

Heal the Bay believes that the public has the right to know the water quality at their favorite beaches as soon as possible, and is proud to provide Californians this information in an easy-to-understand format. We hope that beachgoers will use this information to make the decisions necessary to protect their health.

For more information, please visit www.healthebay.org, or call 800 HEAL BAY