



Heal the Bay

For immediate release

BEACH WATER QUALITY NEARS RECORD STATEWIDE

But Schwarzenegger unilaterally cuts all funding for coastal water monitoring

SANTA MONICA, CA (Thursday, September 25, 2008) – California beachgoers enjoyed another summer of excellent water quality, according to the 2008 End of Summer Beach Report Card released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

But in a disturbing twist, ocean users are now facing increased health risks because of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's unilateral decision this week to eliminate all state funding for beach water quality monitoring.

For 10 years, beachgoers have been protected by AB 411, a state law that created public-health bacteria standards and monitoring requirements for ocean water quality at California's public beaches during the high-traffic summer season.

But this week the governor removed ongoing funding for AB 411 implementation in a line item veto in the just-approved state budget. Water quality monitoring in the state's 15 coastal counties stands to be eliminated or severely curtailed because of the nearly \$1 million cutback.

"The Governor has essentially placed a 'Swim at Your Own Risk' sign along the entire California coastline," said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay. "It's depressing to announce near record water quality at the same time you see the state program that supports it being dismantled."

Some 91% of the 514 beaches tracked statewide by Heal the Bay received A or B grades this summer, an indication of excellent or very good water quality. Those grades are essentially even with last year, when 92% of sites received good grades.

This year, a second summer of drought contributed to positive results statewide because the dry conditions limited the amount of urban runoff, the biggest source of ocean pollution. Infrastructure enhancements, funded by the state's \$100 million Clean Beach Initiative, have also led to improved marks at dozens of chronically dirty beaches.

However, the state's most populated region -- Los Angeles County -- continues to be dogged by troubling water quality during the high-traffic summer season. Nearly one out of five beaches tracked in the county received F grades, 21 out of 109 sites monitored this summer.

Despite some modest improvements, Long Beach still suffers the worst water quality in the state, largely because it sits at the terminus of the contaminant-plagued Los Angeles River. With nearly half of its 25 monitored beaches receiving C to F grades, the city of Long Beach has undertaken proactive source tracking and abatement measures.

(In addition, a redesigned Beach Report Card microsite launches today featuring more robust data, enhanced interactivity and greater functionality. Access the new site at www.healthebay.org/brc.)

Water quality dipped at Santa Monica Bay beaches this summer as well, with 86% of 63 monitored beaches receiving A or B grades, compared to 93% last year. Bay beaches receiving D or F grades this summer include Malibu's fabled Surfrider Beach, Paradise Cove, Solstice Canyon at Dan Blocker Beach and Marie Canyon at Puerco Beach. Further south in the bay, Venice City Beach at Topsail, Dockweiler Beach at Ballona Creek and Santa Monica beaches at the Santa Monica Pier and at Wilshire Boulevard also received D or F marks.

If Los Angeles County beaches are removed from the grading curve, state water quality marks improve dramatically. Nearly 97% of the 405 beaches outside the county earned A and B grades, with only six locations receiving failing grades.

Heal the Bay assigns an A to F letter grade to beaches along the California coast every summer, based on levels of bacterial pollution reported from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. The Beach Report Card is based on the routine monitoring of beaches from Humboldt County to the Mexican border by local health agencies and dischargers. Water samples are analyzed for bacteria that indicate pollution from numerous sources. The better the grade a beach receives, the lower the risk of illness to ocean users.

Orange County boasted outstanding water quality this summer, improving upon already excellent grades, with 98% of its 104 beaches receiving A or B grades. Doheny Beach at San Juan Creek and Poche Creek Beach in San Clemente were the only two locations to receive D or F grades. Historical trouble spots in Huntington and the Doheny beaches maintained their improved A and B marks.

San Diego scored perfect 100% A or B grades for water quality samples collected at its 92 monitored beaches this summer, thanks in large part to multiple efforts to divert storm drain runoff into sewage treatment systems. However, it is important to note that San Diego officials do not intensify water quality monitoring when they close historically troubled Imperial beaches following rain or sewage spills into the nearby Tijuana River. This summer's eight closures countywide protected public health, but the failure to more fully monitor these sites leads to an incomplete water quality picture.

Santa Barbara County also earned improved marks for water quality this summer, with 90% of its beaches getting A or B grades, up 5% from last year. Arroyo Burro Beach notched the only F grade. Meanwhile, 94% of the 54 beaches in Ventura County scored high marks, with Rincon and Surfers Point both receiving D grades.

Seaside beaches along Central and Northern California almost uniformly earned A grades, including those in San Luis Obispo, Monterey, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, San Francisco, Alameda, Sonoma, Mendocino and Humboldt counties.

Pismo Beach Pier (San Luis Obispo), Cowell's Beach (Santa Cruz) and Bakers Beach at Lobos Creek (San Francisco) earned the region's only failing grades this summer. The three Keller beaches monitored in Contra Costa slipped to C and D grades this summer, from last year's A's.

About the BRC

A fact sheet detailing the exact methodology used in determining grades for each location is available at www.healthebay.org/brc/methodology.

For an online version of this year's detailed Summer report card, please visit www.healthebay.org/brc/summer/2008. A PDF version is available directly at www.healthebay.org/brc/summer/2008/PDF.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible by the generous support of Ford Motor Company, simplehuman and the Goldhirsh Foundation.

About Heal the Bay

Heal the Bay is a nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to making Southern California coastal waters and watersheds, including Santa Monica Bay, safe, healthy and clean. We use research, education, community action and advocacy to pursue our mission. Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card program is in its 17th successful year.

Contact: Matthew King, Heal the Bay, (310) 451-1500, x137; mobile 310-850-1145