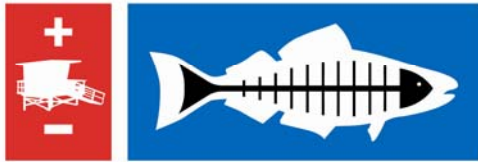


BEACH REPORT CARD



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STATE'S BEACHES EARN HIGH WATER-QUALITY MARKS IN 2008-09

L.A. lags in annual Heal the Bay report; major counties cut testing, receive 'incompletes'

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, May 20, 2009) – California beachgoers enjoyed near-record water quality in 2008-09, according to the 19th annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 502 beaches along the California coast, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2008 through March 2009. During the high-traffic 2008 summer season, 91% of beaches statewide received A or B grades, meaning very good to excellent water quality. That figure marks a slight 2% dip from last summer, which earned the best grades ever issued by Heal the Bay.

Overall, only 32 of the beaches (6%) monitored statewide received D or F grades last summer. High bacteria counts at these sites are linked to such potential illnesses as stomach flu, ear infections and major skin rashes.

High water-quality marks provide optimism, but this year's Report Card is skewed by some troubling data gaps caused by the state's fiscal crisis. With \$1 million in state funding eliminated for weekly beach monitoring, many county health departments have eliminated or cut back on critical sampling and testing.

For example, while some regions pursued creative funding alternatives, Ventura County has completely eliminated testing at all beaches since October. San Diego County monitored 30% fewer beaches this winter than in previous years. In a last-minute effort, Santa Barbara County had to rely on a local nonprofit environmental group to step in and gather samples throughout the winter.

"With summer coming, the state has made assurances that it will start restoring funding to beach monitoring programs, but there is no firm date," said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay. "Until then, swimmers in many locations in San Diego and Ventura are truly swimming at their own risk."

Given that the state's ocean-dependent economy has been valued at \$43 billion, the decision to eliminate all state funding of water quality monitoring strikes many observers as being penny wise and pound foolish. Restoring permanent state funding for beach monitoring is one of several policy suggestions found in this year's the Beach Report Card, which aims to protect the well-being of the 100 million people who visit state beaches annually.

Nonetheless, beachgoers throughout the state can generally feel very secure during the summer season. If they swim at an open beach at least 100 yards away from a storm drain, creek or pier, it's extremely unlikely they will contract an illness.

But year-round ocean users face increased health risks. This year, 55% of monitoring locations statewide received fair-to-poor grades during wet weather, with 35% receiving failing grades. Wet weather grades were down significantly from the same period a year ago.

This growing disparity between improving dry grades and lagging wet grades indicates that cities and counties have made strides to mitigate dry weather pollution but are still grappling with stormwater runoff and the harmful effects it has on coastal water quality.

For the fourth straight year, Los Angeles County had the worst overall beach water quality in the state, including six of the 10 lowest-rated beaches in the survey. A handful of polluted beaches in Malibu, Santa Monica, Avalon and Long Beach dragged down the county's overall year-round A-or-B grade average to a state-low 70%. Historically troubled Long Beach showed some improvements this year, but the majority of beaches near the terminus of the urbanized L.A. River regularly exceed state health standards because of bacterial pollutants that flow freely to the sea.

However, most of the California coastline earned A grades throughout the year in dry weather. Beaches in Orange County earned annual dry grades of A or B at nearly 95% of locations. San Diego also scored well with 91% of its monitored sites earning top marks. However, troubling water quality issues still dog sites near the Tijuana border and Orange County's Doheny and Poche beaches.

Moving up the coast, more than 90% of Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo beaches earned A or B grades during year-round dry weather. Santa Cruz saw 83% of its beaches record A grades year-round. Further north, San Mateo notched perfect 100% A grades at its 11 sites, while San Francisco earned 93%. Bay Area beaches in Alameda and Contra Costa counties slipped somewhat this year, with 10% of their sites earning poor marks.

Marin, Mendocino and Humboldt counties earned perfect 100% A grades in the summer, while Sonoma recorded A or B grades for more than 85% of its beaches.

The Top 10 Beach Bummers

Twenty-three beaches statewide received an overall "F" grade in year-round dry weather during the 2008-2009 Beach Report Card. The ten worst "Beach Bummers" in California (starting with the worst) are:

1. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)*
2. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
3. *Pismo Beach Pier (San Luis Obispo County)*
4. *Colorado Lagoon (Los Angeles County)*
5. *Santa Monica Municipal Pier (Los Angeles County)*
6. *City of Long Beach at LA River outlet (Los Angeles County)*
7. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
8. *Surfrider Beach at Malibu Creek (Los Angeles County)*
9. *Campbell Cove State Park Beach (Sonoma County)*
10. *Doheny Beach at San Juan Creek (Orange County)*

Honor Roll

Some 79 of the 324 (24%) beaches with year-round dry weather grades this year scored a perfect A+. These beaches had zero exceedances of state bacterial standards for ocean water quality throughout the entire time frame of this report. Heal the Bay proudly places these beaches on our inaugural Beach Report Card Honor Roll. A list of these locations can be found in the full report.

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.healththebay.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. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade. We analyzed 502 beaches along the California coast from San Diego to Humboldt counties, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2008 through March 2009.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality during three time periods: summer dry season (April through October), year-round dry weather, and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology utilized in the 2008-09 Beach Report Card is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

An FAQ about the Beach Report Card and water quality is available www.healthebay.org/brc/FAQs.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of Ford Motor Company. Ford has supported Heal the Bay since 1995. The Goldhirsh Foundation, simplehuman and the James Irvine Foundation also provide generous support.

Accessing the Beach Report Card

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card interactive microsite contains weekly updates as well as historical grades by county. www.healthebay.org/brc

In an effort to make water quality information easily accessible from any location at anytime, Heal the Bay and technology partner GoLive! Mobile offer a service that provides Beach Report Card grades via text messaging. Users can visit Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card website (www.healthebay.org/brc/sms) to find the keyword name assigned to their beach.

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 24th year, Heal the Bay is dedicated to making 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 12,000 members. The organization focuses on education, outreach, research and advocacy through programs like Coastal Cleanup Day each September and the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium.

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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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