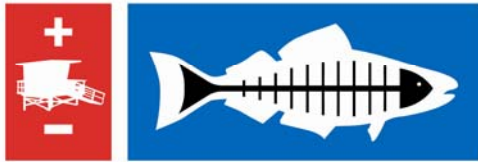


BEACH REPORT CARD



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L.A. BEACH WATER QUALITY REMAINS WORST IN STATE

Ventura, Orange counties top Heal the Bay study, but testing may be axed by state budget mess

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, May 20, 2009) – Los Angeles County had the worst overall beach water quality in the state last year, according to Heal the Bay's 19th annual Beach Report Card, which the environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 94 beaches in the county for the dry-weather period from March 2008 through April 2009, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Only 70% of sites earned A or B grades, a state-low total for the fourth year in a row and nearly even with last year's 71% tally.

Some 15 beaches in the county received year-round F grades, with six of them ranking in Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer List of the most polluted sites in the state.

Overall dry-weather water quality in Los Angeles this year fell slightly below the county's five-year average. A handful of chronically polluted beaches in Malibu, Santa Monica, Avalon and Long Beach helped drag down the county's overall grades.

Meanwhile, Orange County beaches recorded outstanding water quality grades, well above the state average. Some 97% of 103 monitoring locations received an A or B during the summer, as well as 93% for year-round dry weather.

Ventura County also enjoyed excellent water quality during the summer months. Of the 53 beaches monitored, 51 locations received A grades. But on a troubling note, Ventura has ceased ocean testing at all beaches since October in the wake of the state budget crisis, which eliminated all funds to support counties' regular ocean testing. Orange County officials also may decrease sampling if state funding isn't made available by July.

With the high-traffic summer beachgoing season upon us, Ventura's decision jeopardizes public health protections for swimmers throughout the county. Because none of the usual monitoring locations in Ventura County were sampled this past winter, Heal the Bay has issued an overall grade of "Incomplete."

"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 greater Southern California are truly swimming at their own risk."

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.

One of the reasons that Los Angeles County lags in water quality is the fact that its monitoring agencies collect samples directly in front of flowing stormdrains and creeks. Monitoring at these "point zero"

locations, where polluted runoff often pools, is the best way to ensure that health risks to swimmers are captured in water quality data.

Despite Los Angeles' commendable point-zero policy, many of the most polluted beaches in the county do not sit near storm drains: Avalon Harbor, Cabrillo Beach and several sites in Long Beach

Long Beach's water quality overall is poor because it sits at the terminus of the L.A. River, but this year marked the city's best water quality in the past three years. Last year, the City of Long Beach invested over \$300,000 to determine sources of its ocean water bacterial contamination and fix broken sewage pump lines.

On another positive note, 86% of Santa Monica Bay beaches (from Leo Carrillo to Palos Verdes) received A or B grades during the high-traffic summer beachgoing season. While slightly below last year's grades, these marks show dramatic improvement from annual averages over the past six years.

Wet weather water quality in L.A. County this past year was the worst since 2004-2005, with 81% of the 94 monitored beaches countywide receiving C, D or F grades following rainy periods.

This growing disparity between improving dry grades and lagging wet grades indicates that cities have made strides to mitigate dry weather pollution but are still grappling with stormwater runoff and the harmful effects it has on year-round ocean users. Heal the Bay recommends that no one swim in the ocean during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm.

Back in Orange County, seven sites received fair-to-poor year-round dry weather water quality grades. All of these locations are near Doheny Beach and at Poche Beach, which both rank in the 10 lowest-rated beaches statewide.

It should be noted that a new filtration system has come online at Poche, hopefully signaling better results in years to come. All four Baby Beach monitoring locations in Dana Point Harbor this year received A grades year round, a marked improvement over previous years. The popular area has been plagued by a lack of circulation and runoff from multiple sources.

Looking statewide, most California beaches had very good water quality this past year during dry weather, with 262 of 307 (85%) locations receiving very good to excellent (A and B) grades. 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.

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 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% summer grades, 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, 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 is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

An FAQ about the Beach Report Card is available at www.healththebay.org/brc/FAQs. Heal the Bay’s interactive microsite contains weekly updates as well as historical grades. www.healththebay.org/brc

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.

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.

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