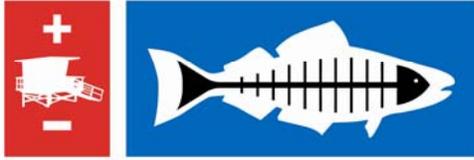


BEACH REPORT CARD



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BAY AREA BEACHES EARN HIGH WATER-QUALITY MARKS

Summer grades top Heal the Bay report, but some bacterial hot spots still plague region

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, May 20, 2009) – Summer beachgoers in the greater San Francisco Bay Area generally enjoyed excellent water quality last year, 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 76 beaches in San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin counties as part of its annual statewide study, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 91% of Bay Area sites received A grades for the summer in the report, slightly above the state average. (Roughly 88% of all the 502 beaches graded in California received A's last summer).

From Marin to San Mateo, the summer dry-weather grades for beaches on the Pacific Ocean were excellent, with 46 of 47 (98%) of the locations receiving an A grade. Bayside sites notched very good grades, with 25 of 29 (86%) receiving A or B marks.

Beachgoers throughout the Bay Area can generally feel very secure during the summer season. If ocean users 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.

However, some area beaches are bacterial hot-spots. San Francisco's Baker Beach at Lobos Creek earned the county's only F grade last summer because of frequent exceedances. San Mateo's Lakeshore Park, a lagoon area with limited circulation, earned poor grades as well. In the East Bay, Alameda's Keller Beach suffered from periodic poor water quality in the summer.

Only 35 of 76 (46%) of San Francisco Bay Area locations are monitored weekly throughout the year. Year-round dry weather water quality at ocean beaches was excellent with, 17 of 18 (94%) of the monitoring locations receiving an A grade. Bayside beaches recorded fair results, with 13 of 17 (77%) receiving A or B grades.

"Local public agencies in the Bay Area should be applauded for maintaining their water quality monitoring programs during peak beachgoing season despite the state's fiscal crisis," said James Alamillo, a Heal the Bay analyst who helped assemble this year's report card.

In contrast to their northern neighbors, a number of Southern California counties have decided to temporarily close or significantly reduce their beach monitoring programs in the wake of the state eliminating funding for regular sampling.

Despite the region's positive grades overall, several Bay Area beaches have been severely impacted by an increasing amount of substantially sized sewage spills in the past two years. In January 2008, more than 5 million gallons of waste poured into Marin's Richardson Bay, leading to beach closures for 10 days. This February, a treatment plant at Fort Baker released more than 700,000 gallons of partially treated wastewater into San Francisco Bay and led to closures once again.

In the wake of that mishap, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board has issued orders to local sanitary districts to demonstrate they are taking corrective measures to abate future spills. Ocean users should stay vigilant and check Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card online for weekly conditions in the affected areas.

Further south in Santa Cruz county, 11 beaches monitored last summer recorded A grades. Only Cowell Beach and Capitola Beach (west of the jetty) lagged with C marks. Up north, Mendocino and Humboldt counties earned perfect 100% grades during the summer, while Sonoma recorded A or B grades for more than 85% of its beaches.

Looking statewide, most California beaches had very good water quality this past year during dry weather, with 276 of 324 (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.

The disparity between dry and wet weather grades continues to be substantial. Nearly 55% percent of monitoring locations received fair to poor grades during the wet weather season, with 35% earning F grades. Wet weather grades were notably worse from the same time period a year ago.

This growing gap 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.

The marked seasonal difference in water quality is why Heal the Bay and public health agencies continue to recommend that no one swim in the ocean during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm.

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%.

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.healthebay.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.

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