



Heal the Bay

For immediate release

BEACH WATER QUALITY STILL ON RISE STATEWIDE

Heal the Bay's Summer Report Card yields high marks for 3rd straight year

SANTA MONICA, CA (Wednesday, September 30, 2009) – Marking an encouraging trend, California beachgoers basked in a third consecutive summer of excellent water quality, according to the 2009 End of Summer Beach Report Card® released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

The group assigned an A to F letter grade to 458 beaches along the California coast, based on levels of bacterial pollution reported from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This summer, 92% of sites received A or B grades during the high-traffic beachgoing season. The grades are slightly better than last year, when 91% of beaches received high marks.

California's persistent and ongoing low rainfall totals, which limited polluted urban runoff in storm drain systems, played a major role in better water quality. Enhanced infrastructure at several sites also led to rising grades. There were only 36 locations in the state that received fair-to-poor water quality grades, roughly 8% of all graded beaches. Some 21 beaches received failing grades statewide.

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.

“Record low rainfall has helped maintain great water quality at the vast majority of California's beaches for the third summer in a row,” said Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay. “But we can't become complacent in our efforts to improve water quality in the summer season. We need long-term funding for beach monitoring and to ensure that problem beaches are safe for swimming every summer.”

Los Angeles County once again had some of the lowest summer grades in the state, with only 80% of its 81 beaches receiving A or B marks. This year, 10 beaches in the county earned F's during the summer, but that marks improvement from last summer, when 19% of sites received failing grades.

On a positive note, Santa Monica Bay monitoring locations fared notably better than last summer, exhibiting water quality of 91% A's and B's compared to last year's 86%. A few Santa Monica Bay beaches still regularly exceeded newly adopted bacteria standards from April 1 to Sept. 3. Santa Monica Municipal Pier, Dockweiler State Beach at Ballona Creek, Surfrider Beach in Malibu, Topanga State Beach and Redondo Municipal Pier were the worst offenders.

Some 40% of monitored Long Beach locations received grades of C or worse, but that marks an improvement from last year, when 48% of beaches scored fair-to-poorly. Of note, there were fewer sites monitored this summer due to budget cuts. Extensive source tracking demonstrates that the vast majority of contamination comes from numerous sources along the 40-mile long, industrialized Los Angeles River, which drains into the ocean in Long Beach.

Orange County once again enjoyed excellent water quality this summer, with 102 out of 103 monitored beaches registering an A or B grade. Despite the installation of a new UV treatment facility at the mouth

of Poche Creek, Poche Beach received an F grade. San Juan Creek at Doheny Beach scored an F grade last year but improved to an A grade this summer. All historically poor beaches in Dana Point received A grades.

San Diego County also notched top marks, with 78 of its 79 monitored beaches winning an A or B grade. The county has completed numerous storm drain diversions into its sewage systems during the busy summer months, spurring a trend of steadily improving marks over the past five years. The only dark spot this summer was Pacific Beach Point, which received an F grade.

Overall water quality at beaches throughout Ventura County was excellent again this summer and among the best in the state. All 39 monitoring locations received A grades. But the number of monitoring locations in Ventura County dropped from 54 last year due to state budget cuts.

Water quality at beaches in Santa Barbara County was some of the best on record this summer. Nearly 94% of Santa Barbara monitoring locations received an A or B grade. Arroyo Burro (C) was the only location that did not earn an A or B grade this summer.

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

Two Santa Cruz beaches received the only F grades north of Los Angeles. Authorities have been tracking the high bacteria counts near one of these failing beaches, Cowell Beach, this summer and attribute them to an excess of decaying kelp. Capitola Beach, west of the jetty, received the county's other F grade.

About Water Testing

In the wake of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2008 line-item veto of funding to support beach water quality monitoring statewide, local agencies had to scramble to pay for this critical public health program this year. The State Water Resources Control Board recently approved 604(b) stimulus funds to extend monitoring throughout 2010. However, there is no secured funding in 2011. Heal the Bay will continue to work with state and local governments to ensure funding for this critical program.

About the Beach Report Card

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible by the generous support of The Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, simplehuman and the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association (SIMA). Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card program is in its 19th year.

A fact sheet detailing the exact methodology used in determining grades for each location is available at www.healthebay.org/brc/methodology. For a PDF version of this year's detailed report card please visit www.healthebay.org/BRCsummer2009.

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.

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