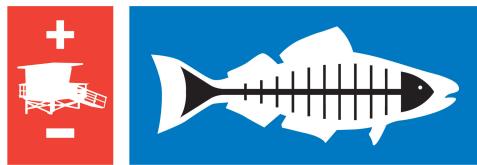


BEACH REPORT CARD



1444 9th Street
Santa Monica CA 90401
Phone: (310) 451-1500
Facsimile: (310) 496-1902
www.healthebay.org

S.D. BEACHES SCORE TOP WATER-QUALITY GRADES

99% get 'A' grades in summer; chronic sewage spills, border plumes still worrying

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Thursday, May 22, 2014) – Ocean lovers in San Diego County continue to enjoy near-perfect beach water quality during the high-traffic summer season, according to Heal the Bay's 24th annual Beach Report Card, which the Santa Monica-based environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 74 beaches monitored along the San Diego coast from April 2013 through March 2014, based on levels of bacterial pollution in the water. Some 99% of those beaches received A grades for the summer period, up from the previous year's 96%. For comparison's sake, only 78% of L.A. County beaches monitored during the summer season received A marks.

San Diego's impressive grades are slightly above the county's five-year average, in which 93% of beaches monitored in dry weather earned A grades. Only one beach received a B grade last summer, with no C, D, or F grades given to any site.

San Diego County's water quality during the winter dry weather time period was also excellent with 98% of the monitored locations notching A grades. However, only 47 locations were sampled during the winter compared to the 74 in summer.

The severe drought now impacting California is likely a major contributing factor to improved water quality at beaches statewide. With record low rainfall reducing the amount of polluted runoff funneled into our seas, water quality has improved throughout the state of California compared to the last annual report.

But there's troubling news for local beachgoers to be found in the report as well.

During wet weather, slightly more than one in five beaches in San Diego County received grades of C, D or F for levels of bacterial pollution. Swimming at a beach with a water quality grade of C or lower greatly increases the risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections and rashes.

San Diego County's large population of surfers and other year-round ocean users continues to be put at risk by pollution found in stormwater runoff, which can foul the ocean for days after the initial rainfall. For this reason, Heal the Bay has been advocating for greater public investment in infrastructure that can capture, clean and reuse stormwater rather than divert it to the sea. In a time of drought, runoff can be a resource rather than a nuisance.

Ongoing sewage-contaminated plumes flowing north from the Tijuana Estuary continue to be the major culprit for closures at Imperial Beach sites. Over the reporting period, the southernmost beaches in San Diego County were closed six different times as a precaution to keep beachgoers away from contaminated plumes.

On a more positive note, seven beaches in the county earned a spot on Heal the Bay's Honor Roll, scoring perfect A+ grades every week of the year, regardless of dry or rainy conditions. (See the full report for the full list.)

"The good news is that San Diego's beaches are staying really clean during the summer, when most people are in the water. But we are concerned with the number of sewage spills in the area; this year San Diego had more beach closures due to sewage than any other California county," said James Alamillo, Urban Programs Manager at Heal the Bay.

Other statewide trends:

- Highly populated L.A. County continues to have the worst overall beach water quality in Southern California, but showed marked improvement from last year thanks to dry weather and some infrastructure improvements.
- In an unusual twist, Northern California placed seven beaches on Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer List, which ranks the top 10 most polluted beaches in the state.
- While low rainfall totals have led to significantly improved water quality statewide, it should be noted that California often swings from extended dry periods to shorter periods of intense, wet weather. An El Niño is predicted for later this year, so renewed flooding could exacerbate underlying water quality issues.

Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades each week based on the latest samples at www.beachreportcard.org. Before heading to the sea, visitors can also access the latest grades on the go by downloading Heal the Bay's free app for mobile devices.

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.beachreportcard.org.

About the Beach Report Card

All county health departments in California are required to test beach water quality samples for three types of indicator bacteria at least once a week during the summer season. Many counties also monitor heavily used beaches year-round. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October 2013), winter dry weather (November 2013 through March 2014) and year-round wet weather conditions. The grading methodology is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

An FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates as well as historical grades can be found at www.beachreportcard.org.

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 29th 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 15,000 members.

Contacts: James Alamillo, Heal the Bay, (310) 936- 5489, jalamillo@healthebay.org

Nick Colin, Heal the Bay, (415) 425-8316, ncolin@healthebay.org
Ana Luisa Ahern, Heal the Bay, (424) 268-6266, aahern@healthebay.org

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.

San Diego: Paloma Aguirre, WiLDCOAST, (619) 495-8939

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