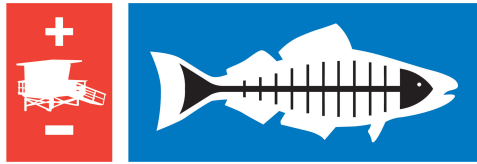


BEACH REPORT CARD



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STATE'S BEACH WATER-QUALITY CONTINUES TO RISE

95% of 455 beaches get A or B grade in Heal the Bay report; drought spurs jump

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 22, 2014) – Californians heading to the shoreline for Memorial Day weekend will be heartened by yet another gain in water quality at beaches statewide, according to data released today by environmental group Heal the Bay in its 24th annual Beach Report Card.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 455 beaches along the California coast for three reporting periods in 2013-2014, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 431 beaches, or 95%, received A or B grades during the summer (April-October 2013). That figure marks a 2% uptick from the previous report.

The severe drought now impacting California appears to be 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, beach scores rose on a year-to-year basis across the state.

Overall, only nine of the beaches (2%) monitored statewide received D or F grades during summer dry weather, when most beachgoers typically use the ocean. High bacteria counts at these sites are linked to such potential illnesses as stomach flu, ear infections and major skin rashes.

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

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 shorelines in the state. Cowell Beach in Santa Cruz County has the dubious honor of being named to No. 1 spot on the Beach Bummer List in this year's report.

On a more positive note, 33 beaches in the state were named to Heal the Bay's Honor Roll, meaning they were monitored year-round and scored perfect A+ grades every week of the year, regardless of dry or rainy conditions.

(See the full report for the full list of Top-10 Bummer and Honor Roll beaches across 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 Nino is predicted for later this year, so renewed flooding could exacerbate underlying water quality issues

With drought threatening local water supplies, Heal the Bay's policy staff is advocating for a public funding measure to build infrastructure projects that capture, cleanse and reuse stormwater rather than dumping it uselessly into the sea. Progressive city planning, smart public infrastructure and so-called Low Impact Development in the private sector would turn a nuisance into a resource

Dry weather also played a significant role in improved winter beach water quality, an area of concern for California's sizable population of surfers and other year-round ocean users. Winter dry water quality was very good, with 92% of beaches earning an A or B grade – a 7% gain from the state's five-year average. In wet weather statewide, nearly 69% of beaches notched A or B grades – a 12% improvement from the state's five-year average.

Most of the California coastline earned A grades throughout the summer reporting period. Some 90% of L.A. County beaches received A or B summer grades, an 8% increase from the county's five-year seasonal average. Beaches in Orange County earned summer grades of A or B at 99% of locations. San Diego County also scored very well, with 99% of its monitored sites earning A marks. However, potentially sewage-contaminated runoff from the Tijuana River closed beaches from Imperial Beach to the international border six separate times during the reporting period.

Moving up the coast, 100% beaches in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties earned A grades during the summer. Nearly nine in 10 San Luis Obispo County beaches notched A grades. Some 85% of Santa Cruz beaches scored A summer grades. Monterey County beaches, which had a few underperforming beaches, earned 75% A or B marks in the summer.

Further north, 83% of San Mateo County beaches scored A grades, and were dragged down by two failing beaches during the summer reporting period. Some 86% of San Francisco locations received A or B grades for the summer in the report, slightly below its five-year summer average. Marin County had 96% of its beaches earn an A grade. Sonoma and Mendocino counties earned perfect 100% A grades during the summer testing period.

As part of a 10-point recommendation plan for improving beach water quality published in the report, Heal the Bay urges state lawmakers to repeal Prop. 218 and lower the threshold for voter approval of stormwater projects. Among the other recommendations: mandated year-round bacteria testing at popular beaches and restored federal funding for water-quality monitoring programs.

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.

Heal the Bay's interactive microsite contains an FAQ section, methodology, weekly grade updates as well as historical grades. www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of SIMA and the Swain Barber Foundation

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.

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