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STATE'S BEACH WATER-QUALITY CONTINUES RISE

93% of 445 monitored beaches get A or B summer grade in Heal the Bay report

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 23, 2013) – Californians heading to the shoreline this summer can take heart in yet another rise in beach water quality, according to the 23rd 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 445 beaches along the California coast for three reporting periods in 2012-2013, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 413 beaches, or 93%, received A or B grades during the summer (April-October 2012). That figure marks a 1% uptick from the previous report.

Overall, only 14 of the beaches (3%) 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.

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.

The improvement in statewide water quality during all three phases of the study's 2012-13 reporting period can be attributed to several factors. Infrastructure improvements aimed at curbing bacterial pollution in dense urban centers have yielded results, but two years of very low rainfall in Southern California seems to have played a major role in improved grades. Rainstorms greatly increase the amount of urban runoff, the greatest source of bacterial pollution at local beaches.

In an alarming development, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is once again recommending the complete elimination of its Beaches Grant Program, a key initiative for protecting public health at our nation's beaches. Nearly \$10 million in beach water-quality monitoring money is on the chopping block in the administration's recently issued federal budget proposal for fiscal year 2014. Many counties in California rely solely on this money to conduct testing. Heal the Bay is urging Congress to restore funding to safeguard the 90 million people who visit U.S. beaches annually.

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 90% of beaches earning an A or B grade – a 7% gain from the state's five-year average. In wet weather statewide, nearly 70% of beaches notched A or B grades – a 14% improvement from the state's five-year average.

Los Angeles County leads Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummers List, with four locations in the ranking of the state's 10 most polluted beaches. Avalon Beach on Catalina Island, troubled by aging sewer infrastructure, holds the No. 1 spot for the fourth time in five years.

The Top 10 Beach Bummers

1. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (L.A. County)*
2. *Cowell Beach – at the wharf (Santa Cruz County)*
3. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
4. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
5. *Malibu Pier (L.A. County)*
6. *Marina Lagoon (San Mateo County)*
7. *Doheny State Beach (Orange County)*
8. *Redondo Beach Pier (Los Angeles County)*
9. *Windsurfer Circle at Candlestick Point (San Francisco County)*
10. *Tijuana River Mouth (San Diego County)*

Most of the California coastline earned A grades throughout the summer reporting period. Some 84% of L.A. beaches received A or B summer grades, a 4% increase from the county's five-year seasonal average. Beaches in Orange County earned summer grades of A or B at 93% of locations. San Diego County also scored very well, with 99% of its monitored sites earning top marks. However, troubling sewage spills closed four beaches near the Tijuana border for 139 days last year.

Moving up the coast, 100% of Santa Barbara, 100% of Ventura and 95% of San Luis Obispo beaches earned A or B grades during the summer. Only 77% of Santa Cruz beaches scored an A or B summer grade. Monterey County beaches earned 75% A or B marks in the summer.

Farther north, 94% of San Francisco Bay Area locations (San Mateo to Marin counties) received A or B grades for the summer in the report, slightly above the state's five-year summer average. Marin, Sonoma and Mendocino counties all earned perfect 100% A grades during the summer testing period.

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 beachreportcard.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 during the summer season. Many California counties 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 2012), winter dry weather (November 2012 through March 2013) 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 at beachreportcard.org. Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of simplehuman, LAcarGUY, SIMA, and the Grousbeck Family Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 28th 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 13,000 members.

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