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SUMMER WATER QUALITY AT L.A. BEACHES RISES AGAIN

84% of beaches get A or B grade; but 4 sites sit on statewide Top 10 Bummer List

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Thursday, May 23, 2013) – Building on an encouraging trend, Los Angeles County continues to demonstrate improved summertime beach water quality, according to Heal the Bay's 23rd annual Beach Report Card®, which the environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 89 beaches in the county for three reporting periods in the 2012-2013 report, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 84% of beaches received A or B grades for the summer period (April-October 2012), a 2% percent gain from last year's report. That figure also marks an increase of nearly 10% from two years ago.

Meanwhile, Orange County notched excellent summer grades, but is still grappling with significant pollution levels at Doheny and Poche beaches. Ventura County continues to report some of the best beach water quality in the state, scoring near perfect grades for both dry and wet weather.

The improvement in L.A. beach 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 have yielded results, but two years of very low rainfall also led to improved grades. Rainstorms greatly increase the amount of urban runoff, the greatest source of bacterial pollution at local beaches.

Despite the improvements, Los Angeles County continues to have the greatest number of beaches with poor water quality grades of any county in the state. During the busy summer, 8% of beaches receive D or F grades, while that figure rises to nearly 30% in wet weather.

The county also is home to four of the 10 beaches listed on Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer list, which ranks the most polluted beaches in the state. Avalon Beach in Catalina once again tops this year's list. Cabrillo Beach harborside, Malibu Pier and Redondo Beach Pier also have the dubious honor of being named a 2013 California Beach Bummer.

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 a separate and 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 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 in Southern California played a significant role in improved winter beach water quality in Los Angeles County, good news for the region's many surfers and other year-round ocean users. Winter dry water quality was good, with 86% of beaches earning an A or B grade –16% higher than the county's

five-year average. And wet weather grades were 23% higher than in the previous report, with 57% A or B grades –24% above the county’s five-year average.

On the positive side, seven beaches in Los Angeles County were placed on Heal the Bay’s Honor Roll, meaning they scored perfect A+ grades for the report’s three time periods.

“We are heartened by numerous individual beach success stories, but extremely dry weather is likely masking the severity of stormwater pollution,” said Kirsten James, Heal the Bay’s science and policy director for water quality. “Heal the Bay will be focusing efforts on implementation of a new regional stormwater permit to address this critical beach water quality issue.”

Orange County beaches once again recorded excellent water quality grades, well above the state average. Some 95 of 102 locations monitored during dry summer weather received an A or B grade, just slightly lower than in last year’s report. Wet weather A and B grades (73%) rose 4% from our last report and bested the county’s five-year average by 17%.

Despite the generally excellent water quality, Orange County had two locations on this year’s Top 10 Beach Bummer List: Poche Beach and Doheny Beach at San Juan Creek. Local agencies are now conducting a more rigorous source identification study. Hopefully these beaches may have finally turned the corner towards cleaner water quality.

Ventura County also enjoyed excellent water quality in the summertime reporting period. All of the 40 beaches monitored during dry weather received A grades. There was only one F grade during any of the three reporting periods of the year – for Hobie Beach during wet weather.

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. A poor grade means beachgoers face a higher risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections and skin rashes.

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. www.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

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