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S.D. BEACH WATER QUALITY AMONG BEST IN STATE

96% of beaches get 'A' grades in summer; sewage spills at border still sore spot

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Thursday, May 23, 2013) – San Diego County continues to record near-perfect beach water quality during the busy summer season, according to Heal the Bay's 23rd annual Beach Report Card®, which the Santa Monica-based environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 71 beaches tracked along the San Diego County coast in 2012-13, based on levels of bacterial pollution in the water. In all, 68 of county sites (96%) received A grades for the summer period, a 3% increase from last year's report. For comparison's sake, 85% of 445 California beaches monitored earned A grades for the summertime period. Only one beach in San Diego County received a C grade for the summer, with no D or F grades given for the time period.

From a year-round perspective, San Diego's water quality during dry weather in the winter months also showed gains, with 98% A or B grades. That figure marks a 5% gain from last year, and also bested both the five-year county average (by 6%) and statewide average (by 8%). Very low rainfall this past year contributed to improving grades, as urban runoff remains the greatest source of bacterial pollution at local beaches. (See page 9 of full report for rainfall totals in Southern California.)

Heal the Bay placed 11 beaches in San Diego on its Honor Roll, a highly selective list of 35 beaches statewide that were monitored year-round and scored perfect A-plus grades during the entire reporting period. San Diego had more beaches on the Honor Roll than any other county statewide.

The Beach Report Card is a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on daily and weekly samples taken from sites along the entire coast of California. A poor grade means beachgoers face a higher risk of contracting illnesses such as stomach flu, ear infections, upper respiratory infections and skin rashes than swimmers at cleaner beaches.

Heal the Bay urges beachgoers to check the latest water quality grades, based on the latest samples, each week at www.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.

But the news is not uniformly upbeat for San Diego beachgoers. The beach at the Tijuana River Mouth took the No. 10 spot on Heal the Bay's annual Beach Bummer List, which ranks the 10 most polluted sites in the entire state.

Flow in the Tijuana River impacts beach water quality at Border Field State Park beach, the Tijuana River Wildlife Refuge and Imperial Beach. Dry weather flow is caused by treated effluent being discharged into the river upstream by a new sewage treatment plant in Tijuana.

Separately, border beaches were impacted this past year by massive amounts of untreated sewage that spilled both into the Tijuana River or were discharged directly to the ocean just south of the border. An estimated 9 million gallons of untreated sewage led to 10 beach closure events from Silver Strand to the U.S. border. The county's four southernmost beaches were off limits for 139 days during the study's reporting period, nine more days than last year.

“Summer and winter swimming at San Diego beaches has probably never been better in recent history than now. The combination of low rainfall, projects implemented to control dry-weather discharges, and greater public education, the County and its municipalities seemingly have runoff issues under control,” said James Alamillo, Urban Programs Manager at Heal the Bay. “Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for sewage. Once again, San Diego led all California coastal counties in the volume of sewage spilled.”

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 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

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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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.

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