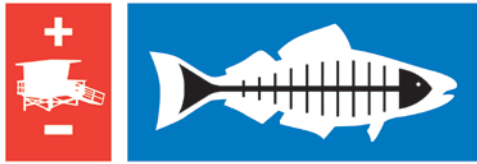


BEACH REPORT CARD



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L.A. BEACH WATER QUALITY DIPS IN 2010-11 *Long Beach lags in Heal the Bay study; O.C, Ventura sites excel*

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, May 25, 2011) – Overall beach water quality at Los Angeles County beaches dipped in 2010-11, according to Heal the Bay’s 21st annual Beach Report Card, which the environmental group released today.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 92 beaches in the county for the dry-weather period from March 2010 through April 2011 based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 75% of sites earned A or B grades, compared to an 80% tally in last year’s report.

The decline can be attributed to a number of factors, most notably higher than usual rainfall totals during the reporting period. Notably, some chronically polluted L.A. County beaches that had seen marked improvement reverted to poor form this year despite millions of dollars being spent on water quality improvements.

The 75% figure for L.A. beaches receiving A or B grades is well below the statewide average of 90%. Despite significant improvements over the course of two decades, Los Angeles County continues to have the greatest number of beaches with poor water quality grades of any county in the state.

“Despite numerous individual beach success stories, this year demonstrated that there hasn’t been progress reducing major beach pollution sources like the Los Angeles River, Malibu Creek and Topanga Creek,” said Dr. Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay.

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

(Ocean goers can check updated grades for their local beach each Friday at beachreportcard.org. Later this summer, Heal the Bay will launch an application for mobile devices that will allow beachgoers to access the latest water grades instantly)

A handful of significantly polluted beaches helped drag down the county’s overall grades, including those in Avalon and Malibu. Long Beach also played a major role. After three years of improved water quality during summer dry weather, Long Beach water quality fell an alarming 40% from last year.

Eight beaches in the county received year-round F grades. And Los Angeles County leads Heal the Bay’s annual Top 10 Beach Bummers List, with four locations in the ranking of the state’s most polluted beaches.

Avalon Beach in Catalina continues its reign as the most polluted beach in Los Angeles County. However after several years of delay, the city of Avalon granted \$5.1 million toward sewer improvements, which will hopefully get underway this summer.

Other county sites on the state's top 10 Beach Bummer list: Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro, Topanga State Beach and Colorado Lagoon in Long Beach.

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 by not having any bacterial exceedances in year-round dry weather.

After spending more than \$2 million and years of staff time to improve water quality at the Santa Monica Pier, city officials can take pride in an annual A grade for the beach south of the pier. The dramatic swing removes the pier from its historical spot on the top 10 Beach Bummer list.

Meanwhile, Orange County beaches once again recorded excellent water quality grades, well above the state average. Some 96% of 84 locations monitored year-round during dry weather received an A or B during the summer, steady with last year's report.

Despite the generally excellent water quality, Orange County had two historically troubled locales join the Top 10 Beach Bummer List: Poche Beach and Doheny Beach. A dry weather filtration-disinfection plant completed last year at Poche Beach has yet to meet performance specifications. County officials continue an ongoing effort to improve surf zone water quality, however, and are actively working to identify lingering causes of pollution.

Wet weather water quality in Orange County this past year was poor with 64% of monitoring locations receiving A or B grades. That figure compares with 42% in 2009-10, an improvement that benefits the county's sizable population of year-round surfers.

Ventura County also enjoyed excellent water quality in 2010-11. All of the 40 beaches monitored during summer dry weather received A grades. There were no F grades during any reporting period. However, D grades were assigned to the following wet-weather locales: Surfer's Point, Promenade Park, San Buenaventura Beach at San Jon Road, Surfer's Knoll and Channel Islands Harbor Beach Park.

One of the reasons that Los Angeles County lags in water quality is the fact that its monitoring agencies – unlike most others in the state -- collect samples directly in front of flowing storm drains and creeks. Orange and Ventura counties monitor 25 yards or more away from flowing drains and creeks.

Monitoring at "point zero" locations, where polluted runoff often pools, is the best way to ensure that health risks to swimmers are captured in water quality data.

However, not all water quality problems in Los Angeles County can be attributed to more stringent testing.

Year-round dry-weather water quality in Long Beach fell dramatically, with only 33% of its monitored beaches receiving A or B grades during the period. That rate lags significantly behind L.A. County's 76% A or B total.

Long Beach's water quality is poor overall because it sits at the terminus of the pollution-choked L.A. River. The nearly 1,000-square-mile drainage area is the predominant source of fecal bacteria to Long Beach waters.

The city is to be commended for investigating and fixing leaking or disconnected sewage pump lines and improperly working diversions. But ultimately the city's water quality is directly tied to the rainfall amounts and enormous runoff volumes from the L.A. River.

Summertime water quality in Santa Monica Bay beaches was excellent, with 91% of the beaches from Palos Verdes to Leo Carillo receiving A or B grades. The figure is markedly better than the seven-year average of 82% and just edged out the statewide average of 80%.

On a more downbeat note, infrastructure improvements at Malibu's Paradise Cove and Marie Canyon and Los Angeles' Cabrillo Beach failed to yield similar results as Santa Monica Pier. These sites still earn D and F grades.

Wet weather water quality in L.A. County in 2010-11 fell significantly, with only 29% of beaches receiving A or B grades compared to 50% last year. Wet weather grades were 7% below the county's seven-year average, with 40 out of 87 sites receiving an F grade.

Cities continue to grapple with storm water runoff and the harmful effects it has on year-round ocean users. Heal the Bay recommends that no one swim in the ocean during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm.

State results

Statewide, most California beaches had very good water quality this past year during year-round dry weather, with 284 of 324 (88%) locations receiving A and B grades. That marks a 2% dip from the previous report.

Overall, 28 of the beaches (9%) monitored statewide received D or F grades during year-round dry weather. Eighteen beaches statewide received an overall F grade during the busy summer beach-going season for the 2010-11 Beach Report Card.

Numerous California beaches vied for the monitoring location with the consistently poorest dry-weather water quality.

Here are the Top 10 "Beach Bummers" in California (starting with the worst):

The Top 10 Beach Bummers

1. *Cowell Beach – at the wharf (Santa Cruz County)*
2. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (L.A. County)*
3. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
4. *Topanga State Beach at creek mouth (L.A. County)*
5. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
6. *North Beach/Doheny (Orange County)*
7. *Arroyo Burro Beach (Santa Barbara County)*
8. *Baker Beach at Lobos Creek (San Francisco County)*
9. *Colorado Lagoon (Los Angeles County)*
10. *Capitola Beach -- west of the jetty (Santa Cruz County)*

Honor Roll

Some 68 of the 324 (21%) beaches with year-round dry weather grades this year scored a perfect A+. These beaches had zero exceedances of state bacterial standards for ocean water quality throughout the entire time frame of this report. Heal the Bay proudly places these beaches on our Beach Report Card Honor Roll. A list of these locations in Los Angeles, Orange and Ventura counties can be found in the full report.

Uncertain Funding Statewide for Beach Monitoring

County monitoring agencies continue to feel the effects of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's 2008 line-item veto of state beach monitoring funds. The governor axed funds that supported the collection and processing of ocean water samples as well as the posting of signs to notify swimmers of health risks.

Fortunately, some local governments have temporarily allocated additional funding to provide this invaluable service to the beach-going public. The State Water Resources Control Board also provided major stop-gap funding through 2011.

There is no secured state funding for ongoing testing of ocean water quality in 2012, placing public health at risk. If the situation does not improve, over half of the beach monitoring in the state will stop. Heal the Bay will continue to work with state and local governments to ensure that ongoing funding is secured.

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.healththebay.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. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade. We analyzed 445 beaches, from San Diego to Humboldt counties, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2010 through March 2011.

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

An FAQ about the Beach Report Card is available at www.healththebay.org/brc/FAQs. Heal the Bay's interactive microsite contains weekly updates as well as historical grades. www.healththebay.org/brc

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of The Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation, simplehuman, LAcarGUY, SIMA, and Grousbeck Family Foundation

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 26th 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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