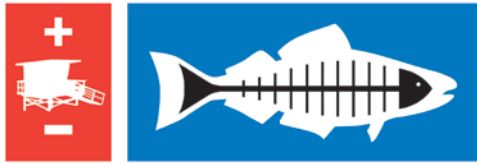


BEACH REPORT CARD



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S.D. BEACHES EARN TOP WATER-QUALITY MARKS

Dry-weather grades on rise from 7-year average in annual Heal the Bay study

SAN DIEGO, Calif. (Wednesday, May 25, 2011) – Beachgoers in San Diego County once again enjoyed near-perfect water quality last year during dry weather, according to the 21st annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

However, San Diego also suffered numerous beach closures due to a series of troubling sewage spills in December, the largest volume of spills reported statewide during the study period.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F letter grades to 47 beaches monitored year-round during dry weather along the San Diego coast, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution. Some 96% of San Diego County sites received dry-weather A grades in the report.

For comparison's sake, only 82% of all California beaches received top marks during the dry-weather reporting period.

Overall, 20 beaches in the 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.

The good grades for dry weather in 2010-11 are well above the county's seven-year average, in which 85% of beaches monitored in dry weather received A grades.

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.

(Oceangoers can check updated grades for their local beach each week 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.)

However, the disparity between dry and wet weather grades continues to be substantial. Nearly 28% of the 47 monitoring locations received fair-to-poor grades during wet weather – either a C, D or F. Beaches that received failing grades during the winter reporting period are San Luis Rey outlet in Oceanside and Border Field State Park at Monument Road.

This gap between improving dry grades and lagging wet grades indicates San Diego has made strides to mitigate dry weather pollution but grapples with stormwater runoff. Wet weather runoff can have harmful effects on year-round ocean users like San Diego's sizable surfing community.

The marked seasonal difference in water quality is why Heal the Bay and public health agencies continue to recommend that no one swim in the ocean during, and for at least three days after, a significant rainstorm.

Uncertain Funding for S.D. 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 potential health risks.

Fortunately, some local governments have temporarily allocated additional funding to provide this invaluable service to the beachgoing public. The State Water Resources Control Board also provided major stop-gap funding through 2011. The San Diego County Board of Supervisors earmarked local monies to replace some lost state funding, but the number of beaches monitored has not returned to pre-2008 levels.

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.

"San Diego continues to record excellent water during dry weather," said Kirsten James, Heal the Bay's director of water quality. "But it is critical that our state decisionmakers find a sustainable source of funding to make sure that continued testing takes place and the public be informed before heading to the beach."

This year no San Diego beaches made Heal the Bay's statewide Top 10 Beach Bummers List, which ranks the most polluted sites in California. Last year, Vacation Isle North Cove Beach in Mission Bay held the No. 9 spot, due to poor circulation at the enclosed beach.

On the negative side, this past year saw massive sewage spills in San Diego County, with nine spills of known volume totaling at least 8 million gallons being responsible for numerous beach closures. The spills were linked to heavy storm damage, such as broken pipes, resulting in sewage system malfunctions. The sewage spilled in San Diego County this past year totaled more than sewage volume spilled in the rest of the state's coastal counties combined.

Further south, water quality in the Imperial Beach area continues to be compromised by sewage-contaminated plumes moving north from the Tijuana Estuary. Over the reporting period, the four southernmost beaches in San Diego County were closed for a total of 237 days as a precaution to keep oceangoers away from contaminated plumes.

State results

Statewide, most California beaches had very good to excellent 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. Los Angeles County still has more beaches with poor water quality grades than any other county in the state.

Eighteen beaches statewide received an overall F grade during the busy summer beachgoing season in 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 San Diego County can be found in the full report.

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 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.healthebay.org/brc/FAQs. Heal the Bay’s interactive microsite contains weekly updates as well as historical grades. www.beachreportcard.org.

Heal the Bay’s Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of The Diller – von Furstenberg Family Foundation, simplehuman, LAcAR GUY, 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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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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