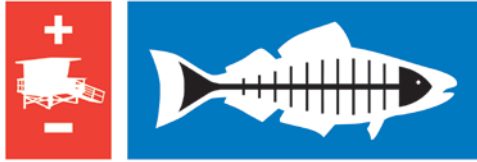


BEACH REPORT CARD



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BAY AREA BEACH WATER QUALITY REMAINS STRONG *84% get A's in annual report card, but bacterial hotspots linger*

SAN FRANCISCO, California (Wednesday, May 25, 2011) – Summer beachgoers on oceanside locations of the greater San Francisco Bay Area once again enjoyed near-perfect water quality last year, according to the 21st annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

Swimmers at bayside beaches could take comfort in overall good summer water quality, but faced pockets of pollution in San Mateo and San Francisco.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F summer grades to 68 beaches in San Francisco, San Mateo, Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin counties as part of its annual statewide study, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution at beaches.

Some 84 % of Bay Area sites received A grades for the summer in the report. Those marks are on par with last year, when 85% of beaches earned A grades in the summer.

For comparison's sake, roughly 86% of the 445 beaches graded overall in California received A's for last summer.

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 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)

From Marin to San Mateo, the summer dry-weather grades for beaches on the Pacific Ocean were excellent, with 38 of 42 locations (90%) receiving an A grade. Bayside sites notched fair grades, with 19 of 26 (73%) receiving A or B marks, down slightly from last year.

Despite the overall reassuring news, some area beaches remain bacterial hot-spots. San Mateo notched very poor summer grades for Aquatic Park (D) and at Lakeshore Park (D), both of which suffer from limited circulation. Water quality at Alameda's Keller Beach was also problematic during the summer, which officials blame on dense aquatic vegetation.

And Baker Beach at Lobos Creek in San Francisco has the dubious distinction of being named again to Heal the Bay's Top 10 Beach Bummer List, which ranks the most polluted sites in the state. Sitting at the terminus of a creek, the Lobos site suffers frequent bacterial exceedances.

Santa Cruz County also landed on this year's Beach Bummer List, with Cowell Beach near the wharf topping this year's statewide list. Capitola Beach near the jetty rounded out the list in the No. 10 spot. It is not uncommon for pier locations with businesses, sewer lines and abundant wildlife to exhibit poor water quality.

Up north, Marin, Sonoma, Mendocino and Humboldt counties earned perfect 100% grades during the summer. Sonoma only tested one beach consistently during the summer reporting period, however, because of budget cuts. Last year agencies monitored seven locations – a disturbing trend that is mirrored elsewhere in the state.

Only 41 of 68 of San Francisco Bay Area locations are monitored weekly throughout the year. Year-round dry weather water quality at ocean beaches was excellent with, 17 of 20 (85%) of the monitoring locations receiving an A grade. Bayside beaches recorded only poor results, with 14 of 21 (67%) receiving A or B grades.

“Ocean and Bay users should be very happy with local water quality this year with 91% of the beach locations monitored receiving an A or B grade during peak beach-going season,” said James Alamillo, a Heal the Bay staff member who helped assemble the report. “But we must remain vigilant about continued state support of ongoing water quality testing.”

Wet weather water quality at San Francisco Bay Area monitoring sites improved from last year and bettered the state average. This year 68% of beaches received A or B marks during rainy weather, compared to the state average of 54%.

Highly urbanized areas throughout the state continue to grapple with stormwater 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.

Further south in Santa Cruz County, all 13 beaches monitored last summer recorded A or B grades except for the two notable exceptions at Cowell and Capitola beaches.

Santa Cruz showed modest improvement in wet-weather grades. With six out of 12 locations earning an A or B grade, compared to last year's three. However, the fact that half the beaches receive poor to failing grades is a troubling sign for the region's significant population of year-round surfers.

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 the most beaches with poor water quality grades of any 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 Northern California can be found in the full report.

Uncertain Funding for 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.

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.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

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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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