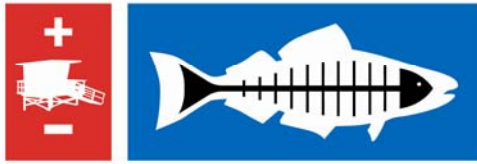


BEACH REPORT CARD



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HEAL THE BAY RATES STATE'S BEST, WORST BEACHES

Ocean water quality hits record high statewide in '08, but L.A. County still lags

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (Wednesday, May 21, 2008) – California enjoyed its best dry-weather beach water quality on record in 2007-08, according to the 18th annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

Heal the Bay assigned A-to-F letter grades to 517 beaches along the California coast, based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2007 to March 2008. During the high-traffic summer beach going season, 93% of beaches statewide received A or B grades, meaning very good to excellent water quality. That figure marks an 8% improvement from the previous summer.

Southern California's record low rainfall last winter led to enhanced water quality by limiting the amount of polluted urban runoff that reaches the ocean via storm drain systems. Only 29 of the beaches (7%) monitored annually statewide received D or F grades in this year's report.

Nonetheless, there continues to be a great divide between water quality in dry weather vs. wet weather. This year, 46% of monitoring locations statewide received fair-to-poor grades during wet weather, with 26% receiving failing grades. Wet weather grades were down slightly from the same period a year ago.

For the third straight year, Los Angeles County had the worst overall beach water quality in the state, including five of the 10 lowest-rated beaches in the survey. While only 71% of Los Angeles County beaches received annual A or B grades, that figure marks significant improvement from last year. In our last report, only 57% of L.A. beaches earned A or B grades and seven of its beaches were on the Beach Bummer list.

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.

"The state-funded California Clean Beach Initiative and local government action has led to significant dry-weather water quality improvement at many previously polluted beaches," said Dr. Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay.

With the summer beachgoing season soon upon us, Gold noted that overall summer dry weather water quality at California beaches was excellent. Dry weather grades for Southern California beaches (San Diego to Santa Barbara counties) mirrored the statewide average for the first time in three years. Save for a few trouble spots, beaches from San Luis Obispo County north to Humboldt County received outstanding grades during the dry reporting period.

This growing disparity between improving dry grades and lagging wet grades indicates that cities and counties have made strides to mitigate dry weather pollution but are still grappling with stormwater runoff and the harmful effects it has on coastal water quality.

"The Report Card is great news for the millions of people that visit California's beaches each year," said Gold. "But it also demonstrates that stormwater pollution was as bad this winter as it was a decade ago. Local governments have a long way to go before making beaches safe year-round."

Los Angeles County received dramatically improved annual marks, with 71% of its beaches receiving a yearlong A or B grade, compared to 57% last year. Yet the county still had the worst overall water quality in the state, mostly due to severe water quality issues at numerous Long Beach locations. While the city showed improvements at some locations, many Long Beach sites were still negatively impacted by pollutants flowing from the Los Angeles River outlet.

Meanwhile, 92% of Santa Monica Bay beaches (from Leo Carillo to Palos Verdes) received A or B grades during dry weather months, a dramatic improvement from the last two years.

One of the reasons that Los Angeles County lags in water quality is the fact that its monitoring agencies collect samples directly in front of flowing stormdrains and creeks. Monitoring at these “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. Despite Los Angeles’ point-zero policy, many of the most polluted beaches in the state do not sit near storm drains: Avalon Harbor, Cabrillo Beach and several sites in Long Beach.

Unfortunately, there is no standardized monitoring protocol among counties, with many measuring dozens of yards from outfalls. These discrepancies make it hard to make comparisons among certain beaches. In one of several public health suggestions found in this year’s the Beach Report Card, Heal the Bay urges regulators to adopt consistent statewide monitoring standards.

However, most of the California coastline earned A grades throughout the year in dry weather. In the southern part of the state, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties went to the head of the class, with 100% of sites earning top marks. Beaches in Orange and San Diego counties earned annual dry grades of A or B at more than 95% of locations. However, troubling water quality issues still dog sites near the Tijuana border and Orange County’s Doheny and Poche beaches.

Moving up the coast, more than 90% of San Luis Obispo and Santa Cruz beaches earned A or B grades during dry weather, while San Francisco, Alameda and San Mateo produced A to B dry grades at more than 80% of their beaches throughout the year. This year’s report marks the first time that all beaches in San Francisco Bay are included in our annual report card.

Summer-only water quality monitoring in Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties resulted in A or B grades for more than 85% of their beaches.

The Top 10 Beach Bummers

Twenty four beaches statewide received an “F” grade in dry weather during the 2007-2008 Beach Report Card. The ten worst “Beach Bummers” in California (starting with the worst) are:

1. Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)
2. Santa Monica Municipal Pier (Los Angeles County)
3. Poche Beach (Orange County)
4. North Beach Doheny (Orange County)
5. Marie Canyon Drain at Puerco Beach (Los Angeles County)
6. Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)
7. City of Long Beach -- multiple locations (Los Angeles County)
8. Campbell Cove State Park Beach (Sonoma County)
9. Clam Beach County Park near Strawberry Creek (Humboldt County)
10. Pismo Beach Pier (San Luis Obispo County)

For a detailed look at beach results for each county and report methodology, please refer to our complete report. A PDF version is available www.healththebay.org.

An FAQ about the Beach Report Card and water quality is available www.healthebay.org/brc/FAQs.

About the Beach Report Card

By assessing fecal bacteria levels, and making this information available to the public, the Beach Report Card is designed to protect the public health of the more than 100 million people who visit California's beaches. Local health agencies complete routine monitoring of the beaches and analyze water samples for bacteria that indicate pollution. The grading methodology utilized in the 2007-08 Beach Report Card is endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card is made possible through the generous support of Ford Motor Company. Ford has supported Heal the Bay since 1995. The Goldhirsh Foundation, simplehuman and the James Irvine Foundation also provide generous support.

Accessing the Beach Report Card

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card microsite contains weekly updates as well as historical grades by county. www.healthebay.org/brc

In an effort to make water quality information easily accessible from any location at anytime, Heal the Bay and technology partner GoLive! Mobile offer a service that provides Beach Report Card grades via text messaging. Oeangoers can now get instant water quality grade information for any of the nearly 500 beaches monitored statewide on their cell phones or other mobile device.

Users can visit Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card website (www.healthebay.org/brc/sms) to find the keyword name assigned to their beach. They can then send a text message with the beach's name to the number 23907. The current grade for that beach will be text messaged back instantly.

About Heal the Bay

Now in its 23rd 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 12,000 members. The organization focuses on education, outreach, research and advocacy through programs like Coastal Cleanup Day each September and the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium.

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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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