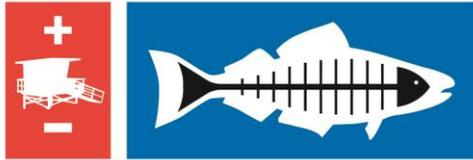


## BEACH REPORT CARD



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## MIXED WATER QUALITY GRADES AT BAY AREA BEACHES

*S.F. sites improve sharply in summer; San Mateo lags in Heal the Bay report card*

SAN FRANCISCO (Thursday, May 23, 2012) – Summer beachgoers on oceanside locations of the greater San Francisco Bay continue to enjoy excellent water quality, according to the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual Beach Report Card, which was released today by environmental group Heal the Bay.

But swimmers should take more caution at bayside beaches, with several sites in San Mateo County getting D or F grades in the summer due to high levels of fecal indicator bacteria. Cowell Beach in nearby Santa Cruz County also had the dubious distinction of being included this year on Heal the Bay's Beach Bummer List, which ranks the 10 most polluted shorelines in the state.

Heal the Bay analysts assigned A-to-F summer grades to 69 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 tracked from April to October, 2011. (Year-round grades and other details can be found in the full report.)

On a very encouraging note, the three most polluted beaches in San Francisco in last year's report improved drastically: Baker Beach at Lobos Creek (B), Candlestick Point at Windsurfer Circle (B) and Sunnydale Cove (A). These summer grades mark a dramatic improvement from last year, when Baker Beach at Lobos Creek held the No. 8 spot on the statewide Beach Bummer list.

Some 54 of Bay Area beaches (78%) received A grades for the summer, a 6% dip from last year's A totals. (For comparison's sake, roughly 81% of the 441 beaches graded 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 U.S. Pacific Coast. 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.

From Marin to San Mateo, the summer dry-weather grades for beaches on the Pacific Ocean were excellent, with 42 of 43 locations (98%) receiving an A or B grade. Bayside sites notched very good grades, with 23 out of 26 beaches (88%) receiving A or B marks, a 15% improvement from summer 2010.

Despite the overall reassuring news, some bayside beaches remain bacterial hot-spots. San Mateo notched very poor summer grades for Pillar Point Harbor (D), Oyster Point (D), Aquatic Park (F) and Lakeshore Park (F), which suffer from limited circulation.

Up north, Sonoma and Mendocino and counties earned 100% A grades during the summer.

Further south in Santa Cruz County, only three out of 13 (23%) beaches received below an A or B grade during summer dry weather. Winter dry grades were excellent with 92% of locations receiving an A or B

grade. Water quality was also very good (83% A and B grades) during wet weather (besting the county's five-year average by 30%), a good sign for the region's significant population of year-round surfers and other oceans users.

Cowell Beach is the only greater Bay Area beach to earn a spot on this year's Beach Bummers list. Last year Cowell Beach was designated as the most (No. 1) polluted beach in the state. This year, Cowell Beach took the No. 2 slot. The exact source of beach water bacteria still has local health officials puzzled. Some speculate decomposing kelp prevalent in the water and on the beach may be harboring bacteria and contributing to water quality exceedances. A source tracking study is being conducted.

"We are pleased to see excellent beach water quality in the San Francisco Bay Area this year, with 94% of beaches receiving an A or B grade during the peak summer season," said Amanda Griesbach, a water quality scientist and lead author of the report. "Many of these exceptional grades can be credited to local water quality improvement efforts. However, there continues to be disparity between wet and dry weather water quality, making it important for local agencies to maintain momentum towards implementing water quality improvement projects."

### **State results**

Statewide, most California beaches had very good to excellent water quality this past year during summer dry weather, with 407 of 441 (92%) locations receiving A and B grades. That marks a 2% improvement from the previous report.

Overall, 34 of the beaches (8%) monitored statewide received C, D or F grades during summer dry weather. Some 19 beaches statewide received an overall F grade during the busy summer beachgoing season, up from last year's 18.

Los Angeles County still has more beaches with poor water quality grades than any other county in the state (only 82% A or B grades during dry summer weather.)

Numerous California beaches vied for the "Beach Bummers" crown this year. Seven of the 10 most polluted beaches in the state this past year were in Los Angeles County.

### **Top 10 California Beach Bummers**

1. *Avalon Harbor Beach on Catalina Island (Los Angeles County)*
2. *Cowell Beach (Santa Cruz County)*
3. *Puerco Beach at the Marie Canyon storm drain (Los Angeles County)*
4. *Surfrider Beach (Los Angeles County)*
5. *Dan Blocker County Beach at Solstice Creek (Los Angeles County)*
6. *Cabrillo Beach harborside (Los Angeles County)*
7. *Doheny State Beach at San Juan Creek outlet (Orange County)*
8. *Poche Beach (Orange County)*
9. *Escondido State Beach (Los Angeles County)*
10. *Topanga Beach (Los Angeles County)*

### **Uncertain Funding for Beach Monitoring**

County monitoring agencies continue to feel the effects of then-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.

In response, the State Regional Water Quality Control Board now has the discretion to allocate fees up to \$1.8 million towards beach water quality monitoring. This year, the state only approved \$1 million to fund the entire beach monitoring program. The shortfall will seriously affect the number and frequency of sites tracked throughout the year.

To safeguard the health of beachgoers, Heal the Bay makes the following recommendations to state and national beach water quality regulators. Details in report.

- Strengthen the EPA’s soon-to-be revised beach water quality criteria, not weaken them.
- Implement year-round monitoring of popular beaches statewide
- Incorporate numeric pollution limits in all stormwater permits
- Adopt statewide regulations of septic systems, which can leak bacteria into receiving waters.

**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](http://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 during the summer season. Heal the Bay compiles the complex shoreline data, analyzes it and assigns an easy-to-understand letter grade. We analyzed 650 beaches in California, Oregon and Washington based on levels of weekly bacterial pollution reported from April 2011 through March 2012.

The summary includes an analysis of water quality for three time periods: summer dry season (April through October), winter dry weather (November 2011 through March 2012) 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](http://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, LAcarGUY, SIMA, and Grousbeck Family Foundation

### **About Heal the Bay**

Now in its 27th year, Heal the Bay makes 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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