

San Diego County Beach Closures and Advisories in 2000

Summary and Comparison to Previous Years

In 2000, San Diego County experienced 2419 beach closure and advisory days as a result of reported water contamination events¹. The county as a whole also experienced 38 days when coastal waters were under a General Advisory due to urban runoff impacting beaches after rainfall.

Year 2000 had the greatest number beach closure and advisory days in San Diego County since information was recorded on these events. Year 2000 continued the trend of increasing beach closure and advisory days that started in 1998 when El Niño rains contributed to a large number of sewage spills. Yearly totals rose again in 1999 after the Beach Safety Bill was implemented in July. This law, also known as AB 411, standardized water monitoring and beach posting requirements statewide. In addition to more stringent requirements to post beaches when bacteria levels are exceeded in monitoring, a new bacteriological indicator, enterococci, was added to water analysis. The year 2000 was the first full year that local health agencies used the new regulations in the Beach Safety Bill. Unrelated to the new monitoring requirements, the number of sewage spills causing beach closures also increased from 1999.

Beach Closures

A "closure" is the placement of signs at a public beach that informs the public that the area is closed to swimming and/or water contact due to water contamination. Orange or yellow warning signs reading "*Contaminated Water - Keep Out!*" indicate a beach closure. A beach closure is a consequence of a reported sewage spill that impacts, or may impact, water quality at a recreational beach. Sewage contaminated water poses the greatest health risk to ocean users.

Beach Advisories / Warnings

An advisory or warning is the placement of signs at a public beach that warns the public against swimming and/or water contact due to the risk of possible illness. White warning signs reading "*Warning - Contact With This Water May Cause Illness. Bacteria Levels Exceed Health Standards*" indicate an advisory/ warning. An advisory/ warning is a consequence of bacteria levels in monitoring results exceeding State standards. The source of the bacteria is usually unknown, but may include domestic pet, wildlife, bird, or human feces, soils, or decaying plant matter. Another situation in which a beach is under advisory is during the excavation of a river mouth or lagoon opening when potentially contaminated water is released into the ocean. Shoreline water monitoring includes over 100 locations from San Onofre State Beach to the U.S./ Mexico border sampled weekly between April 1 and October 31.

General Advisory

The Department of Environmental Health issues a General Advisory to avoid all ocean and bay water contact for 72 hours after 0.2 inches or more of rain. A General Advisory is listed on the County web page (www.sdcdeh.org "Beach & Bay Water Quality"), phone message (619.338.2073), and in the San Diego Union Tribune weather page. When rainfall washes pollutants off streets and urban areas, urban runoff is carried to beaches via storm drain, river, and lagoon outlets where it contaminates ocean waters. Swimming near these outlets has been correlated to an increased risk of illness among ocean users.

¹ The 2419 day closure and advisory total does not include beaches posted under chronic status due to on going sources of contamination. Beaches under a chronic status included the Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge and Border Field State Park, Buccaneer beach in Oceanside, and the Children's Pool in La Jolla. Although monitoring results at these beaches was occasionally within State standards, the presence of a known source of contamination, i.e., a river, a creek, and seals respectively, require these areas to be posted as a precaution.