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Executive Summary

Heal the Bay's 11th Annual Beach Report CardSM provides essential water quality information to the millions of people who swim, surf or dive in Southern California coastal waters. Essential reading for ocean users, the report card grades over 375 locations on an "A"–"F" scale based on the risk of adverse health effects to humans. The grades are based on daily and weekly bacterial pollution levels in the surf zone. The program has developed from an annual review of beaches in Santa Monica Bay to weekly updates of beaches throughout Southern California. All this information is available in print and at www.healthebay.org. This year, Heal the Bay is proud to announce the expansion of the Beach Report Card program to coastal counties statewide. Starting in June 2001, the Beach Report Card will cover over 475 beaches from Del Norte County through San Diego County.

The 2000-2001 Annual Beach Report Card demonstrated that most beaches had very good water quality in dry weather, with 234 of 375 (62%) locations receiving "A" grades. Also, there were 59 (16%) "B"s, 26 (7%) "C"s, 16 (4%) "D"s and 40 (11%) "F"s. Numerous Southern California beaches vied for the "Beach Bummer" crown this year (the monitoring

location with the poorest dry weather water quality). The bottom 10 beaches were: Cabrillo Beach, harbor-side at San Pedro Bay in Los Angeles County (10th); Surfrider Beach at Malibu in Los Angeles County (9th); Avalon Bay Beach at Catalina Island in Los Angeles County (8th); Tijuana Slough (Tijuana River outlet) in San Diego County (7th); the Visitor's Center (projection of Clairemont Dr.) at Mission Bay in San Diego County (6th); Baby Beach at Dana Point Harbor in Orange County (5th); Pacific Beach at PB Point (downcoast of Linda Way) in San Diego County (4th); Doheny Beach at Dana Point in Orange County (3rd); Channel Islands Harbor Beach Park (Hobie & Kiddie Beach) in Ventura County (2nd). This year's winner of the dubious Southern California "Beach Bummer" crown is Arroyo Quemada in Santa Barbara County. Finishing third for the title last year, Arroyo Quemada "won" the crown because 73% of the monitoring days exceeded thresholds for at least one fecal bacteria indicator.

During wet weather, very few beach locations in Southern California escaped the influence of polluted stormwater runoff. Of the 277 locations monitored, only 49 of them received good-to-excellent water qual-



ity marks (26 (9%) “A”s and 23 (8%) “B”s) during wet weather, while 228 locations receiving fair-to-poor water quality marks (18 (6%) “C”s, 22 (8%) “D”s and 188 (68%) “F”s). Overall, 68% of the monitoring locations received a grade of “F” during wet weather, compared to only 11% during dry weather.

In addition to grading the beaches throughout Southern California, Heal the Bay analyzed the data to determine if there were any Southern California-wide dry-weather water quality monitoring trends. Heal the Bay found that 91.4% of the 21,100 beach sample days (the number of dry weather days when samples were collected at the 375 monitoring locations from April 2000 through March 2001) met State bathing water standards for all bacterial indicators. Another finding from our analysis was that water quality at open-ocean beaches was significantly better than those beaches impacted by storm drains or located within enclosed bays or harbors. Approximately 81% of open ocean beaches received an “A” grade, compared to 67% at beaches impacted by a storm drain, and 37% at beaches found within an enclosed bay, harbor or marina.

This year, Governor Davis proposed, as part of the state budget, \$100 million for a Clean Beach Initiative to protect and restore the health of California’s beaches. The funds would be the first significant allocation for protecting the public health of the 100 million people who visit California’s beaches annually. The Clean Beach Initiative is broadly supported by health agencies, coastal cities and counties, researchers from numerous California universities, and the environmental community.

The Beach Report Card is based on the routine monitoring of beaches conducted by local health

agencies and dischargers. Water samples are analyzed for bacteria that indicate pollution from numerous sources, including fecal waste. The higher the grade a beach receives, the lower the risk of illness to ocean users. The report is not designed to measure trash or toxins. The Beach Report Card would not be possible without the cooperation of all of the shoreline monitoring agencies in the state.

Heal the Bay believes that the public has the right to know the water quality at their favorite beaches, and is proud to provide Californians this information in an easy-to-understand format. We hope that California beachgoers will use the information as they use the sunscreen SPF ratings: they should decide what they are comfortable with in terms of relative risk, and then make the necessary decisions to protect their health.

County health officials and Heal the Bay recommend that beach users should never swim or surf within 100 yards of any flowing storm drain, or in any coastal water during, and for three (3) days after, a rainstorm. Storm drain runoff can be the largest source of pollution to local beaches, flowing untreated to the coast and often contaminated with motor oil, animal waste, pesticides, yard waste and trash. After a rain, indicator bacteria counts usually far exceed state health criteria for recreational water use.

For more information, please log on to www.healthebay.org, or call 800 HEAL BAY.

Heal the Bay thanks the Ford Motor Company for their generous support of the Beach Report Card program and the publication of this report.

