



Executive Summary

Heal the Bay's 15th Annual Beach Report CardSM provides essential water quality information to the millions of people who swim, surf, or dive in California coastal waters. Essential reading for ocean users, the report card grades approximately 350 locations year-round (about 460 locations in dry weather from April to October) on an A-F scale based on the risk of adverse health effects to swimmers and surfers. The grades are based on daily and weekly fecal bacteria pollution levels in the surfzone. The program has evolved from an annual review of beaches in Santa Monica Bay to weekly updates of all monitored beaches throughout California. All this information is available in print and at www.healthebay.org.

The 2004-2005 Annual Beach Report Card shows that most beaches had very good water quality, with 278 of 346 (80%) locations receiving very good-to-excellent (A and B) grades for the year during dry weather. There were also 30 (9%) Cs, 11 (3%) Ds and 27 (8%) Fs. California's overall good-to-excellent dry weather grades were just slightly below the average of 82%, with southern California's (Santa Barbara through San Diego) grades even a few more points below the average (78% A's and B's).

As in past years, there continues to be a great disparity in water quality between dry and wet weather conditions. 2004-2005 was one of the worst wet weather years on record. The enormous amount of rain throughout the state resulted in an incredible 90% of the 346 locations monitored during wet weather receiving fair-to-poor (C – F) grades. This was the most polluted wet weather season on record since the statewide beach monitoring program began in 1999. Southern California wet weather grades were even worse than the state average (and well below the 5 year average of 31% good-to-excellent grades) having only 7% A or B grades during wet weather.

Numerous California beaches vied for the "Beach Bummer" crown this year (the monitoring location with the poorest dry weather water quality). The 10 finalists were: Paradise Cove west of the pier in Malibu (10th), Redondo Municipal Pier in Los Angeles County (9th), Pillar Point Harbor at Capistrano Ave. in San Mateo County (8th), Pacific Beach, P.B. Point downcoast of Linda Way in San Diego County (7th), Baby Beach at Dana Point Harbor in Orange County (6th), Avalon Beach between the storm drain and Busy Bee Restaurant on Catalina Island (5th), Campbell Cove State Park Beach at Bodega Bay in Sonoma County (4th), and Cabrillo Beach harborside at the lifeguard tower in Los Angeles County (3rd). Two beaches share the dubious honor of being California's worst "Beach Bummer" this year. Doheny Beach from North Beach to 1000 feet south of the San Juan Creek in Orange County and the stretch of beach from Imperial Beach at Seacoast Drive to Border Field State Park at the Border Fence in San Diego share the award of "Beach Bummer" based on the beach area degraded and the severity of poor water quality.





Heal the Bay completed an analysis of data from Santa Barbara County through San Diego County to determine if there were significant differences in water quality based on beach type. From our analysis, water quality at open ocean beaches was significantly better than water quality at those beaches impacted by storm drains or located within enclosed bays or harbors. Approximately 84% of open ocean beaches received an A grade year-round for dry weather compared to 59% at beaches impacted by a storm drain, and 36% at beaches found within an enclosed bay, harbor or marina. All category percentages were slightly off (down from previous analysis) due to the lasting impacts of this year's winter storms. However, the percentages during the summer dry weather time period (AB411), when most beachgoers were in the water, had 93% of open ocean beaches with A grades, compared to 74% of beaches impacted by a storm drain, and 52% of beaches found within an enclosed bay, harbor or marina.

Heal the Bay will be introducing a new grading methodology for the Beach Report Card this year. For the fourth time in the 15 year history of the program, Heal the Bay is modifying its Beach Report Card grading methodology to better characterize local beach water quality. Amendments to the grading methodology include: 1) the inclusion of the geometric mean into the calculation, 2) a firm zero to 100 point scale, 3) greater significance given to the most recent sample(s) relative to past samples, and 4) greater weight for enterococcus and the total to fecal ratio relative to total coliform and fecal coliform. These modifications stem from comments made by California's State Water Resources Control Board and the Beach Water Quality Workgroup. With these improvements to the methodology, Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card grading system is now endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board and the Beach Water Quality Workgroup as an effective way to communicate beach water quality to the public.

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 the amount of trash or toxins found at beaches. 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 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 beachgoers will use this information to make the decisions necessary to protect their health.

County health officials and Heal the Bay recommend that beach users never swim within 100 yards of any flowing storm drain, or in any coastal water during a rainstorm, and for at least three days after a storm has ended. Storm drain runoff can be the greatest 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 onto www.healthebay.org, or call 1-800-HEAL BAY