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HEAL THE BAY'S BEACH REPORT CARD GRADES CALIFORNIA'S BEST AND WORST BEACHES

Los Angeles County has Top Five Most Polluted Beaches in California

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SANTA MONICA, Calif. (May 24, 2006) – Heal the Bay released its 16th annual Beach Report CardSM for 2005-2006 today, and Los Angeles County had by far the state's lowest grades, with the five most polluted beaches in the state and seven of the top ten. Only 68% of LA County beaches scored an A or a B letter grade, compared to the statewide average of 85% that got A's and B's during dry weather.

Heal the Bay's Beach Report Card, a comprehensive evaluation of coastal water quality based on daily and weekly samples gathered at beaches from Humboldt County to the Mexican border, assigns an A to F letter grade to more than 450 California beaches based on their levels of bacterial pollution. 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.

It shows that some of the most beautiful beaches in the region, including Surfrider in Malibu and Avalon on Catalina Island, are some of the most polluted. A beautiful beach isn't necessarily a clean beach. "This Beach Report Card demonstrates that just because you go to the beach in a multi-million dollar neighborhood doesn't guarantee it is safe for swimming," said Dr. Mark Gold, Executive Director of Heal the Bay. "Whether you are in San Pedro or in Malibu, you have a chance of being next to a highly polluted beach. Beach water quality knows no geographic or economic bounds."

Last year, monitoring programs were modified to collect samples directly in front of flowing storm drains and creeks, locations known as "point zero," and 14 new Santa Monica Bay sites from Malibu to Palos Verdes were added under the beach bacteria Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) requirements. The new monitoring program for Los Angeles County demonstrates that people who swim directly in front of flowing storm drains are more likely to encounter highly polluted waters.

The Los Angeles County Health Department did not act on over a year's worth of the new monitoring data, failing to notify the public of beach pollution at any of the 14 beaches. Eight of those "new" beaches received F grades in the prime beach season from April 1—October 31. The health department receives the information within 48 hours of its collection, and did not inform beach cities of the extent of their water quality problems, never posted warning signs at the beaches, and never released media advisories warning the public of potential health risks.

The dubious distinction of the most polluted beach in California actually goes to four locations in North Santa Monica Bay that tied for the most number of violations: Escondido Creek and Puerco Beach at the Marie Canyon storm drain in Malibu and Castle Rock Beach at the Castlerock and Santa Ynez storm drains in Pacific Palisades.

Yet vast expanses of the California coastline got a letter grade of A, including the South Bay of Los Angeles County, Palos Verdes, as well as Seal Beach to Huntington Beach and Newport to San Clemente in Orange County, stretches of Ventura County, and nearly all beaches in North San Diego County.

According to the 2005-2006 report, overall water quality in dry weather continues to be good, meaning that the majority of California's beaches are in great condition for swimming and surfing throughout the upcoming summer season. Approximately 85% of the beaches monitored statewide received a grade of A or B, meaning very good to excellent water quality.

"We're happy to report that most beaches in the state continue to have safe levels of bacteria during the summer months, especially open ocean beaches," said Dr. Gold.

As in past years, there continues to be a great disparity between dry and wet weather, when water quality typically plummets, due to the pollution that rain flushes through the storm drain system and into the ocean. While 80% of the beaches monitored in Southern California during summer dry weather received A grades, that number dropped to only 37% during wet weather, with 31% of the beaches monitored receiving an F grade.

"The public has a right to get water quality information that will help them make informed decisions about where to take their families swimming," said Dr. Gold. "The Beach Report Card helps families understand which beaches they can visit without fear of getting sick."

The 16th Annual Beach Report Card is the first to incorporate new monitoring methodology endorsed by the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Beach Water Quality Work Group.

“The Beach Bummers”

32 beaches statewide received an F grade in the 2005-2006 Beach Report Card. The ten worst “Beach Bummers” in California (starting with the worst) are:

2005 - 2006 Annual Beach Report Card		
California Beach Bummers		
1	North LA County Beaches, including Escondido Beach, Puerco Beach at Marie Canyon, and Castle Rock Beach at the Castlerock and Santa Ynez storm drains	Los Angeles
2	Will Rogers State Beach at Chautauqua Blvd.	Los Angeles
3	Avalon Beach on Catalina Island	Los Angeles
4	Surfrider Beach in Malibu	Los Angeles
5	Santa Monica Municipal Pier	Los Angeles
6	Pillar Point Harbor at Capistrano Avenue Beach	San Mateo
7	Doheny Beach	Orange
8	Tijuana Rivermouth	San Diego
9	Topanga State Beach	Los Angeles
10	Cabrillo Beach harborside at the lifeguard tower	Los Angeles

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 from numerous sources, including fecal waste. Beach Report Card weekly and annual updates are available at www.healthebay.org .

About Heal the Bay

Heal the Bay, celebrating its 21st year, is dedicated to making Santa Monica Bay and Southern California coastal waters safe and healthy again for people and marine life. It is one of the largest nonprofit environmental organizations in Los Angeles County, with more than 10,000 members. The organization focuses on education, outreach, research and advocacy through programs like Coastal Cleanup Day each September and the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium. Beach Report Card weekly and annual updates are available at www.healthebay.org

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