



Recent Accomplishments of the BEACH Watch Program: 1998 Update

Overview

On May 23, 1997, USEPA Administrator Carol Browner formally announced the BEACH Program to strengthen U.S. beach programs and water quality standards, better inform the public, and promote scientific research to further protect the health of beachgoers. The accomplishments of the BEACH Program in its first year of existence are significant and indicate that EPA and its state partners are making progress to achieve the program's goal to "significantly reduce the risk of infection at the nation's recreational waters through improvements in recreational water programs, communication, and scientific advances." This fact sheet discusses the achievements of the BEACH Program's first year.

Beach Survey

EPA conducted the first annual National Health Protection Survey of Beaches in the spring of 1998. This voluntary survey of government agencies collected information on beach health activities carried out at local beaches. The survey asked questions like the following: Which beaches are monitored and how frequently? Who conducts the monitoring? Where and how often have advisories been posted? What are likely pollution sources? What are the water quality standards?

The information from this survey was put on the Internet so the public can view detailed beach information on local beaches at EPA's "Beach Watch" web site at www.epa.gov/ost/beaches. The Phase I results (summarized below) are currently available. Next year, EPA will conduct a Phase II survey to fill data gaps, expand the survey to inland waters, and enhance mapping capabilities to help the public locate specific beaches. In future years, EPA will conduct annual surveys and provide up-to-date information on local beaches to the public.

Survey Participation

EPA distributed a total of 350 questionnaires to beach health protection agencies requesting information on local beaches. The Agency received 159 responses which included information on about 1,000 beaches. The respondents were almost exclusively local governmental agencies from coastal counties, cities, or towns bordering the Great Lakes, the Atlantic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Pacific Ocean, although a few respondents were state or regional (multi-county) districts. Questionnaires were received from 26 states and Guam.

Monitoring and Programs at Local Beaches

The 159 survey respondents said that there are 117 programs in place that monitor beach water quality for bacteria or other pathogens, 124 agencies have advisory or closing programs in

Location area of agencies providing beach information for the 1998 survey

Location	Total Number of Coastal Counties	Number of Coastal Counties Participating	Percent of Coastal Counties Participating
Atlantic Ocean	133	65	49%
Pacific Ocean	47	23	49%
Gulf of Mexico	57	35	61%
Great Lakes	83	46	55%

Questionnaires were received from:

Alabama	Mississippi
California	New Hampshire
Connecticut	New Jersey
Delaware	New York
Florida	North Carolina
Guam	Ohio
Hawaii	Oregon
Illinois	Pennsylvania
Indiana	Rhode Island
Maine	South Carolina
Maryland	Texas
Massachusetts	Virginia
Michigan	Wisconsin
Minnesota	

place to close the beach or restrict swimming when unsafe water quality conditions are present, and 126 agencies have recreational water quality standards for bacteria or other pathogens in the areas. Where standards have been established, the following indicator species are used:

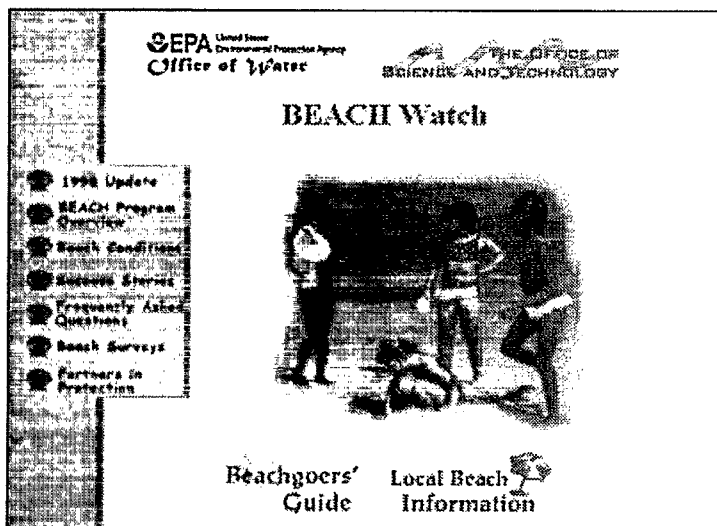
Indicators	"Averaging Period" Standard: Number Using Indicator	"Instantaneous" Standard: Number Using Indicator
Total Coliform	30	28
Fecal coliform	69	55
E. coli	25	22
Enterococci	26	28
Other	1	3

National Conference

The Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and EPA cosponsored the first national beach health conference.

This conference was held October 15-16, 1997, in Annapolis, Maryland. Conference attendees discussed current issues and activities related to beach health and exchanged information about beach health initiatives across the country. They identified unaddressed beach health needs and assigned priorities to short-term and long-term actions. They also encouraged greater consistency among jurisdictions in beach monitoring and notification. Representatives from the federal government, states, counties/cities, academic institutions, associations, environmental groups, and others attended the conference.

Key recommendations and reactions are summarized in an EPA publication titled *National Beach Conference, Report on Action Items* (EPA-823-R-98-004). ASTHO is preparing a detailed proceedings document and expects to publish it later in 1998. See the last paragraph of this fact sheet for information on how you may order a copy of this document.



Visit EPA's "BEACH Watch" web site at <http://www.epa.gov/OST/beaches>.

Regional Projects—EMPACT

In late 1997, EPA accelerated plans to build local partnerships with the organizations responsible for monitoring waters at beaches. EPA's Office of Water teamed with the Agency's Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking (EMPACT) program and selected five areas as pilot projects to establish and improve:

- Strong state/local partnerships
- Bacterial indicators and monitoring methods

Current Regional Projects

- EPA Region 1: Charles River and Boston Harbor, Massachusetts
- EPA Regions 4 and 6: Florida coastal communities and the Gulf Coast
- EPA Region 9: Southern California

- Site-specific predictive tools
- Ways to communicate time-relevant information (such as postings and closures) through a variety of media (including use of the Internet, telephone hotlines, newspapers, local radio and TV reports, multilingual presentations, etc.)

A key goal of this effort is to integrate national and local beach health information and make it available to the public quickly and accurately. All the regional projects plan to make this information available to the public by using the Internet and other time-relevant notification approaches. EPA is also linking the survey data with local Internet information "hubs." At the national level, EPA will design a long-term data system that can quickly accommodate monitoring and advisory information on beach health. The agency is also working to improve predictive tools (rainfall and hydrodynamic models) to help get information to the public before exposure might occur. Regional projects are under way in four EPA regions.

Guidance and Technical Assistance

EPA is developing a technical training video and instruction manual to explain recommended methods for bacteriological analysis. This will include information on EPA's revised *Method 1600: Membrane Filter Test Method for Enterococci in Water* (EPA-821-R-97-004). The Agency is also funding the first phase of a multiyear effort to improve the accuracy of methods for predicting beach water quality.

Clean Water Action Plan and the BEACH Action Plan

The Clean Water Action Plan, released by President Clinton and Vice President Gore in February 1998, describes a series of actions designed to strengthen core clean water programs which are carried out by several different governmental agencies. As part of the "Clean Waters: Healthy People" portion of this plan, for example, EPA will implement a series of key actions to ensure that beaches are safe for swimming.

Specifically, EPA will soon develop and release a "BEACH Action Plan" that describes priority actions for implementing beach monitoring and notification programs at all levels of government. The plan will include priority research, training, and guidance needs for the implementing agencies. It will provide detailed program plans, identify plans to address unresolved scientific research issues, describe water quality standards issues, and address other aspects of the BEACH Program. The plan will be available for review later this year. For a general overview, see EPA's *BEACH Program* document (EPA-820-F-97-002).

For Further Information...

Visit EPA's "BEACH Watch" web site at <<http://www.epa.gov/OST/beaches>>. This site contains key information for EPA's BEACH Program. This on-line directory will eventually become the national information hub for up-to-date information on beach health protection activities throughout the United States, including water quality monitoring, local protection programs, and other beach-related programs. You can order documents by calling the National Center for Environmental Publications and Information (NCEPI) at 1-800-490-9198, by writing them at 11029 Kenwood Road, Building 5, Cincinnati, Ohio 45242, or by faxing them at 513-489-8695.



United States
Environmental Protection
Agency (4305)
Washington, DC 20460

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