

Study: LA Has State's Worst Beach Water

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Emily Saxton, 12, left, and Rachel Crino, 12, of Denver, run on the beach in Santa Monica, Calif., Tuesday, Oct. 24, 2006. Heal the Bay held a news conference Tuesday to announce their findings from 2006 "End of Summer Beach Report Card," an annual evaluation of California's water quality and bacteria levels from Humboldt County to the Mexican border. The study released Tuesday found that once again Los Angeles County has the state's most polluted beaches, but this time a new city has been anointed as the county's biggest loser, Long Beach. (AP Photo/Nick Ut)

(AP) -- A study released Tuesday found that once again Los Angeles County has the state's most polluted beaches, but this time a new city has been anointed as the county's biggest loser - Long Beach.

"We're number one," said Mark Gold, executive director of Heal the Bay, which oversees the annual report. "It seems to be the same overall

result, but this year the story is different. Usually you can point to Santa Monica Bay as the problem but we've never seen what we saw in Long Beach this summer."

The Santa Monica-based clean water group released its annual end-of-summer beach report card, which grades beaches from Humboldt County to the Mexican border.

Water samples collected between Memorial Day and Sept. 30 were analyzed for bacteria. The better the grade, the lower the risk of illness to beachgoers. Overall the state's water quality looked good, the report said.

Long Beach traditionally scores well during the summer months, Gold said. This year, however, only 12 percent of the water samples taken in the area got high clean-water marks, in comparison to 91 percent last year. City officials who are still investigating the source of the pollution, say part of the problem may have been a leaking pump station used by several boats.

The city's low grade contributed to the county's overall poor showing.

For the most part, beaches in Santa Monica Bay did a little better than last summer. The underachievers include: Santa Monica Pier, Dockweiler State Beach at Ballona Creek mouth, part of Manhattan Beach and the Redondo Municipal Pier.

Pollutants in Santa Monica Bay have been a problem for years and some of the area's most famous beaches have repeatedly received poor grades from Heal the Bay. Most contamination occurs during winter when heavy rains overload storm drain and sewage systems, washing waste directly into the sea. Swimming in such waters can cause gastrointestinal, respiratory and other illnesses.

Regional water officials decided in September to begin a process of fining cities surrounding Santa Monica Bay up to \$10,000 a day if beaches do not meet clean-water standards. Los Angeles County is spending \$1 million to try and pinpoint the pollution sources in Malibu that end up in the bay.

The news wasn't all bad. Counties that got top marks included: San Diego, Orange County, Ventura, San Luis Obispo, Monterey County, Santa Cruz, San Mateo, San Francisco, Sonoma and Humboldt.

Still, even among the high-scoring counties, there were some problem areas. Refugio State Beach and Hope Ranch Beach in Santa Barbara received lower-than-usual grades, as did part of Huntington State Beach in Orange County. Santa Cruz Main Beach at the wharf "saw terrible water quality during a month sampling period in July," the report said.

There were also some pleasant surprises. Doheny Beach in Orange County, usually the most polluted beach in the entire state, had "excellent water quality at multiple locations."

"Doheny did the best its ever done," Gold said.

In addition Monarch Beach improved from a grade of F last summer to a B this year. Newport Bay and Will Rogers State Beach also had excellent water quality.

Heal the Bay was unable to get a reading on Marian, Mnemonic or Del Norte Counties in part because the water was not sampled enough. The report did say there were no known sewage spills in these counties that led to beach closures.

By NOAKI SCHWARTZ, Associated Press Writer

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