

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



EPA's BEACH Report:

Washington 2007 Swimming Season

July 2008

Introduction

The BEACH Act of 2000 requires that coastal and Great Lakes states and territories report to EPA on beach monitoring and notification data for their coastal recreation waters. The BEACH Act defines coastal recreation waters as the Great Lakes and coastal waters (including coastal estuaries) that states, territories, and authorized tribes officially recognize or designate for swimming, bathing, surfing, or similar activities in the water.

This fact sheet summarizes beach monitoring and notification data submitted to EPA by the State of Washington for the 2007 swimming season.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the Washington BEACH Program tests the water for bacteria at approximately 55 saltwater beaches. While swimming occurs mainly in summer, other contact activities such as SCUBA diving, surfing, and kayaking occur throughout the year. The BEACH Program's mission is to test the water for bacteria at the state's public saltwater beaches and notify the public when bacteria levels indicate a risk of illness to beach goers. The State Departments of Ecology and Health manage the program. The sampling and beach posting is carried out by the cooperative efforts of county health and surface water programs, tribes, non-profit organizations, and volunteers.

Bacteria levels at Washington's marine waters are typically very low with 85% of samples showing bacteria levels below the detection limit. Beaches that exceed water quality standards are usually located in shallow enclosed bays located close to urban areas and have a stream flowing onto the beach. In addition to monitoring and notification, the BEACH Program works to identify beaches with chronic problems and assist county health departments in fixing the problems. Washington experienced horrific flooding during November and December of 2007. The bad weather resulted in major sewage spills throughout Puget Sound and it was impossible to post all the beaches. However, a state-wide warning was released. The program uses an outreach program to educate the public about the risks of water born illnesses and what each of us can do minimize that risk and improve water quality.

Figure 1. Washington coastal counties.



Table 1. Breakdown of monitored and unmonitored coastal beaches by county for 2007.

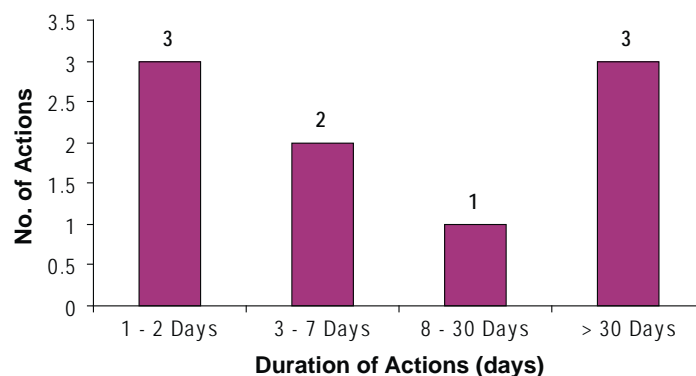
County	Total Beaches	Monitored	Not Monitored
CLALLAM	61	9	52
GRAYS HARBOR	24	3	21
ISLAND	61	4	57
JEFFERSON	52	3	49
KING	64	10	54
KIITSAP	60	10	50
MASON	41	4	37
PACIFIC	29	1	28
PIERCE	55	8	47
SAN JUAN	165	0	165
SKAGIT	51	1	50
SNOHOMISH	32	6	26
THURSTON	16	1	15
WHATCOM	32	5	27
TOTALS	743	65	678

2007 Summary Results

How many notification actions were reported and how long were they?

Washington's approach is to issue a beach advisory when water quality standards are exceeded at a particular beach that warns people to avoid contact with the water. A total of 8 monitored beaches had at least one advisory issued during the 2007 swimming season. Figure 2 presents a full breakdown of notification action durations. About 33 percent of Washington's notification actions lasted two days or less.

Figure 2: Beach notification actions by duration.



What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?

For Washington's 2007 swimming season, actions were reported about 1 percent of the time (Figure 3).

How do 2007 results compare to previous years?

Table 2 compares 2007 notification action data with monitored beach data from previous years.

What pollution sources impact monitored beaches?

Figure 4 displays the percentage of Washington's monitored beaches potentially impacted by various pollution sources. In 2007, 85 percent of the beaches were not investigated for sources of pollution.

Figure 3: Beach days with and without notification actions.

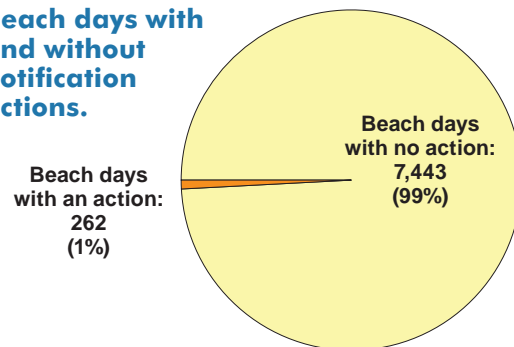


Table 2. Beach notification actions, 2005–2007.

	2005	2006	2007
Number of monitored beaches	73	80	65
Number of beaches affected by notification actions	6	20	8
Percentage of beaches affected by notification actions	8%	25%	12%
Percentage of beach days affected by notification actions	3%	4%	3%

For More Information

For general information about beaches:
www.epa.gov/beaches/

For information about beaches in Washington:
www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach/

Figure 4: Percent of monitored beaches potentially impacted by pollution sources (65 beaches).

