

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

# EPA's BEACH Report: 2011 Swimming Season

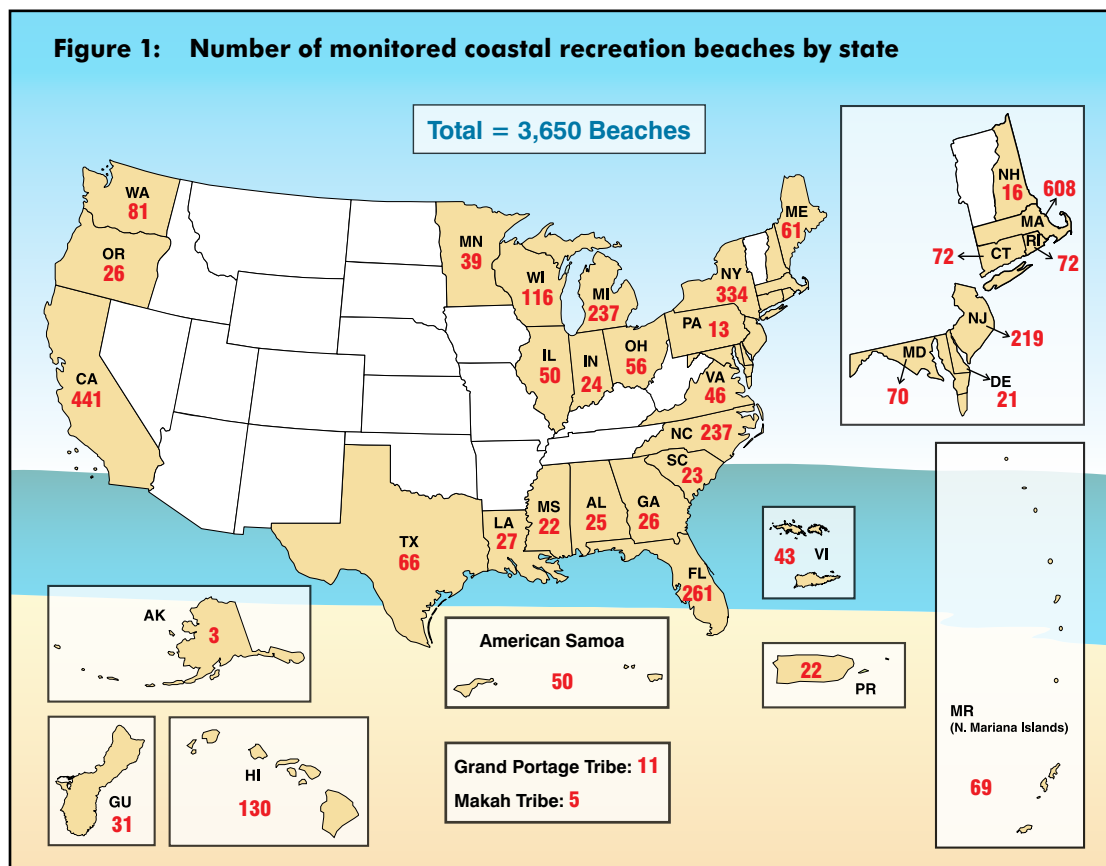
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## Introduction

The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act of 2000 authorizes EPA to provide grants to coastal and Great Lakes states, territories, and eligible tribes to monitor their coastal beaches for bacteria that indicate the possible presence of disease-causing pathogens and to notify the public when there is a potential risk to public health. The BEACH Act requires that recipients of those grants report their coastal beach monitoring and notification data to EPA, and that EPA maintain an electronic database of that data, accessible to the public, so that they can make informed choices about where to swim. To support reducing the risk of exposure to disease-causing pathogens at recreational beaches, EPA is posting the latest data submitted to EPA about beach closings and advisories for the 2011 swimming season. This fact sheet also highlights recent developments in EPA's beach program.

**Figure 1: Number of monitored coastal recreation beaches by state**



## 2011 Swimming Season Results

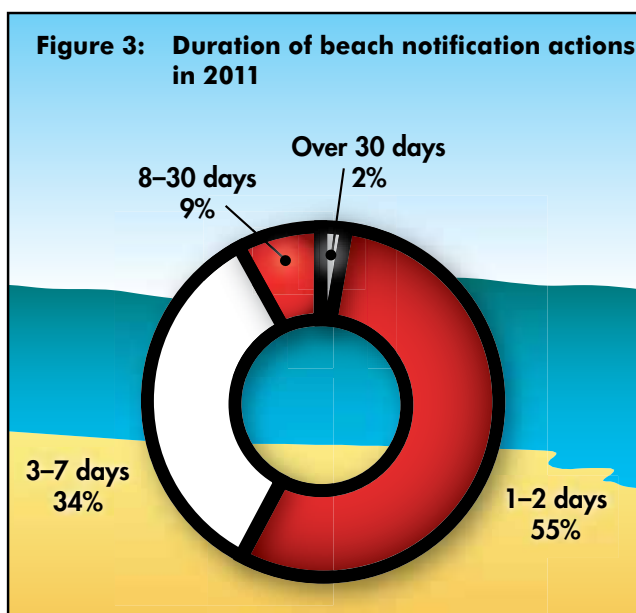
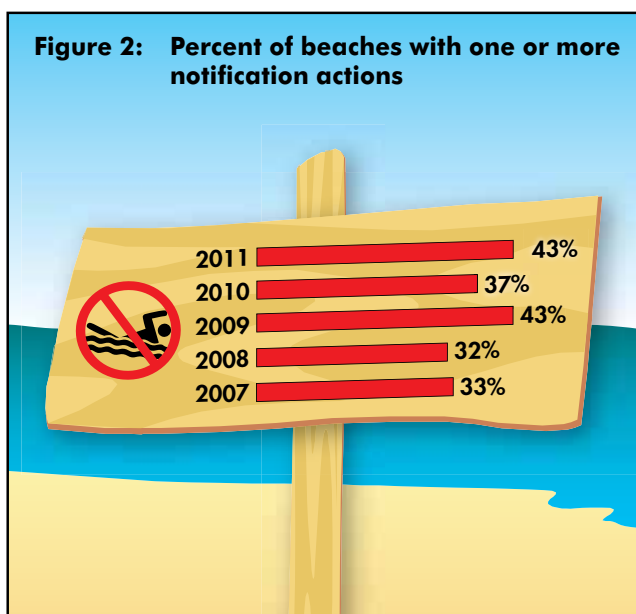
When monitoring results at swimming beaches show that levels of specific indicator bacteria in the water exceed applicable water quality standards, states, territories, and tribes issue a beach advisory, warning people of possible risks of swimming; or close the beach to public swimming until further monitoring finds that water quality complies with applicable standards. Some states and local agencies, in addition to water sampling, use models or other predictive tools as a basis for issuing notification actions at beaches.

### How many beaches had notification actions?

In 2011 of the 3,650 coastal beaches that were monitored (Figure 1), 1,575 (43 percent) had at least one advisory or closure (Figure 2). This is about a 14 percent increase over the 2010 swimming season. One reason for the increase is that Hawaii issued several islandwide, rainfall-based advisories in 2011. As a result, 130 Hawaiian beaches had actions, compared to only 20 beaches in 2010. New York and Connecticut also issued more rainfall-based advisories than usual in 2011, primarily because of Hurricane Irene's landfall in late August.

### How many notification actions were issued and how long did they last?

A total of 6,532 notification actions (i.e., advisories or closings) were issued by states, territories, and tribes during the 2011 swimming season. Typically an action is lifted when follow-up monitoring proves that water quality complies with applicable standards. For the majority of cases in 2011 (55 percent) water quality returned to normal and beaches were deemed safe for swimming within one or two days (Figure 3). Only rarely (11 percent) did notification actions last more than a week.



**Table 1. Data collected on beaches, advisories, and closings**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
<b>Number of monitored beaches</b>	3,647	3,786	3,782	3,654	3,650
<b>Number of beaches affected by advisories or closings</b>	1,184	1,208	1,616	1,362	1,575

**Figure 4: Percent of beach days open and safe for swimming**

2011	 To the Beach >	95.2%
2010	 To the Beach >	95.3%
2009	 To the Beach >	95.1%
2008	 To the Beach >	95.0%
2007	 To the Beach >	94.4%



**What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?**

EPA calculates the total available beach days and the number of beach days with advisories or closings to better track trends over time. To calculate total available beach days, we multiply the length of each state’s and territory’s beach season by the number of beaches in the state or territory. For 2011 EPA determined that 694,191 beach days were associated with the swimming seasons of 3,650 monitored beaches. Notification actions were reported on 33,127 days, meaning that beaches were under an advisory or closed about 5 percent of the time, the same as the past four years (Figure 4).

**Protecting your local beaches**

Beach advisories and closings can be the result of several different factors: overflows from sewer systems, either by design or due to blockages; treatment plant malfunctions; stormwater runoff after rainfall; waste from boats; leaking septic systems; or pet and wildlife waste. To help minimize the risk to beachgoers, EPA is helping communities build and properly operate sewage

treatment plants, working to control overflows to reduce them as much as possible, and working with the U.S. Coast Guard to reduce discharges from boats and larger ships. To find out more about what you can do to help, visit: <http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/dosdoints.cfm#protect>. To find out more about sources of beach pollution in your area, contact your local beach program: [http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/wherelive\\_state.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/wherelive_state.cfm).

**Recent Developments in EPA’s Beach Program**

**EPA Improved Access to Online Beach Conditions Data (BEACON)**

The Clean Water Act section 406(e) requires EPA to make available a national database that contains state reported beach monitoring and notification data. In 2003 EPA created the BEACON (BEach Advisory and Closing Online Notification) system to meet the Agency’s BEACH Act requirements. We have upgraded the BEACON system to use state-of-the-art map navigation and report display tools. Maps are now dynamically produced and show the location of more than 6,000 beaches and the related water quality monitoring stations on road or satellite base maps. For the first time, reports can combine both notification data and water quality monitoring data. Also for the first time, new state data can be displayed every 2 hours. <http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beacon2/>

**Development of New or Revised Water Quality Criteria for Recreational Waters**

As required by the BEACH Act of 2000, EPA has been conducting critical science and research, and will publish new or revised recreational water quality criteria by October 2012. The new or revised criteria recommendations EPA develops will replace the criteria recommendations issued in 1986. In accordance with a Consent Decree and Settlement Agreement, EPA completed its research by December 15, 2010. In December 2011, EPA published in the *Federal Register* draft Recreational Water Quality Criteria recommendations for scientific views. There was a 60-day public comment period, and EPA accepted comments until the comment period closed on February 21, 2012. EPA is updating the criteria recommendations based on comments received and will sign for publication in the *Federal Register*

a notice announcing the availability of the final criteria by October 15, 2012. To find updates on the development of the new or revised criteria visit: <http://water.epa.gov/scitech/swguidance/standards/criteria/health/recreation/index.cfm>.

### **National List of Beaches**

EPA is updating and improving the National List of Beaches on its website. The BEACH Act requires EPA to periodically identify and publish a list of discrete coastal recreation waters adjacent to beaches or similar points of access that are used by the public. The Agency must also identify whether there is a monitoring and notification program for each beach.

EPA first published the National List of Beaches in 2004 and provided its first update in 2008. The National List of Beaches contains beaches identified by the states, tribes and territories ("state") under the BEACH Act in U.S. coastal and Great Lake waters. The list does not include beaches on inland waters because they are not subject to the BEACH Act.

The National Lists of Beaches for the 2004, 2008, and 2010 swimming seasons are static pdf

files and are at [http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/list\\_index.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/list_index.cfm). These lists are primarily organized by state and county. For some territories and Hawaii, the beaches are listed by island. Alaska's beaches are reported by community. Beach names are listed with their monitoring status for the selected swimming season.

Starting with the 2011 swimming season, the List of Beaches will be dynamic, linking each beach to its page in BEACON. Each page will show the extent of the beach, provide the most recent advisory status and water quality monitoring data that the state has reported, and link to the state's website for the most up-to-date information. We expect to post the dynamic List of Beaches on our website in July 2012.

### **For More Information**

For general information about beaches visit: [http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/beaches\\_index.cfm](http://water.epa.gov/type/oceb/beaches/beaches_index.cfm).

For information about a specific beach visit: <http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beacon2/>.