



U.S. EPA's BEACH Program Activities

U.S. EPA's BEACH Program was created to reduce the risk of disease to swimmers who may ingest contaminated water. Through the BEACH Program, U.S. EPA is working to improve beach monitoring and public notification procedures at coastal beaches. Beach water quality monitoring programs vary widely across the country. Some communities do not monitor their beaches, and those that do may not be using the best indicators, which tell whether pathogens may be present. Since the BEACH Program's inception in 1997, a number of activities have been initiated to reduce the risk of disease to users of our nation's recreational waters. Following is a brief description of some of the activities under the three main themes of the BEACH Program: strengthening beach programs and water quality standards, informing the public about recreational water quality, and conducting research to improve the scientific basis for beach programs.

Strengthening Beach Programs and Water Quality Standards

Protective Water Quality Standards. Strong state and tribal water quality standards provide the scientific and programmatic framework for enhancing protection of beaches and recreational waters. EPA is developing and promulgating protective standards for recreational water quality and providing the tools and guidance necessary for implementing those standards. EPA is working to ensure that states and tribes adopt the *Ambient Water Quality Criteria for Bacteria - 1986* and make the transition to monitoring for its recommended *E. coli* and enterococci indicators rather than total coliforms or fecal coliforms by April 2004.

Conferences. A series of national and regional technical conferences have been held to provide forums for learning about beach health initiatives across the country, to identify beach health needs, and to recommend protocols and procedures to encourage greater consistency among jurisdictions in beach monitoring and notification. Information and communication networks have been formed as a result of these conferences. **Selected presentations from the annual conference of the Great Lakes Recreational Water Quality Association, held at the Chicago Cultural Center Oct. 30, 2002 and co-sponsored by EPA, are online at <http://www.great-lakes.net/glrwqa/>**

BEACH Act Grants. The recently passed BEACH Act, which amends the Clean Water Act, requires EPA to ensure state adoption of recreational water quality standards, revise water quality criteria, publish beach monitoring and notification performance criteria, publish floatables guidance, and maintain a beach database. The BEACH Act also authorizes EPA to award grants to coastal states and territories to develop and implement beach monitoring and public notification programs. There was a total of \$10 million in funds available in 2002 for 35 eligible states and territories. The Great Lakes states have received the following BEACH Act allocations:

Illinois: \$248,615

Indiana: \$206,670

Michigan: \$287,556

Minnesota: \$204,631

New York: \$366,030

Ohio: \$227,879

Pennsylvania: \$226,953

Wisconsin: \$228,396

Guidance Documents. EPA is working on developing a number of guidance documents

addressing recreational water quality monitoring, risk assessment, risk management and risk communication. A draft of the *National Beach Guidance and Grant Performance Criteria for Recreational Waters*, being developed in connection with the BEACH Act's requirement that EPA publish performance criteria for monitoring and notification of coastal recreation waters by April 2002, was circulated for public comment until October 1, 2001. The document can be found at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/technical.html>

Great Lakes Strategy. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office is promoting "Clean and Healthy Beaches" in their Great Lakes Strategy to improve infrastructure for monitoring Great Lakes beach water quality and implement actions to reduce beach closings and advisories.

Informing the Public about Recreational Water Quality

When recreational water quality standards are exceeded, not all beach managers post signs to close a beach or issue warnings that it might not be safe to swim. One of the goals of the BEACH program is to develop a consistent public notification program to ensure that people are informed of the health risks associated with swimming in contaminated water.

BEACH Watch. EPA's BEACH Watch website communicates timely recreational water quality information to the public and to local authorities. The site contains information about individual beaches and protection programs, conference information, and beach reports and references. The BEACH Watch website is at: <http://www.epa.gov/OST/beaches>

National Beach Health Survey. EPA conducts an annual survey to collect detailed national data on state and local beach monitoring efforts, applicable standards, beach water quality communication methods, the nature and extent of beach contamination problems, and any protection activities. A summary of 2001 survey results are available at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/2001surveyfs.pdf> Results of the 2002 swimming survey will soon be available on EPA's BEACH Watch website.

Improving the Scientific Basis for Beach Programs

Research. EPA is working on improving the science that supports recreational water monitoring programs. Current efforts include water quality indicators research (e.g., rapid indicators of fecal pollution and indicators that distinguish between human and animal fecal contamination), modeling and monitoring research, and exposure and health effects research.

Microbiological Methods. EPA has proposed microbiological methods for water ambient monitoring using *E. coli* and enterococci. The proposed rule on *Guidelines Establishing Test Procedures for the Analysis of Pollutants; Analytical Methods for Biological Pollutants in Ambient Water* was published in the Federal Register 8/30/2001, pages 45811-45829.

Methods Video. U.S. EPA has developed a video to help states and tribes make the transition to *E. coli* or enterococci indicators and test methods. The video, *Improved Enumeration Methods for the Recreational Water Quality Indicators: Enterococci and Escherichia coli*, is available by calling (513) 489-8190 and requesting U.S. EPA document EPA/822/V-99/001 (and EPA/821/R-97/004 for the accompanying manual).