

Safe to Swim - California Beaches

California Water Quality Monitoring Council (SB 1070)

The Beach Water Quality Workgroups in northern and southern California have volunteered to work with the Monitoring Council on the Safe-to-Swim web pages and data presentations. These groups will work to incorporate all of their beach data and help perform website management of these pages. The groups are dedicated to improving beach water quality monitoring and reporting and see these goals as perfectly aligned with the California Water Quality Monitoring Council's efforts.

The two beach water quality monitoring stakeholder groups meet quarterly. They consist of local environmental health, stormwater, and wastewater agencies, environmental groups, scientists, and regulators from the state and local regional water quality boards. It is the local environmental health agencies which collect and report the beach water quality monitoring data. The southern California group currently meets at the SCCWRP offices and has worked together for over 10 years. The northern California group has been meeting for almost four years. In addition to the quarterly larger group meetings, there are often technical subgroup meetings as needed to address specific beach related issues. There would be a technical subgroup committee set up to work on the Safe-to-Swim webpage.

SCCWRP has also been instrumental in helping the state and local agencies manage and report their beach water quality monitoring data. SCCWRP created the local agency's Access databases to manage their sample data and help the agencies to report their data to the State Board Beach Watch database. SCCWRP will be assisting the Beach Water Quality Workgroups in implementing and managing the Safe-to-Swim parts of the Water Quality Monitoring Council's website. We (the workgroups and SCCWRP) will work to integrate the county information, third party information and the state information into the Safe-to-Swim website framework.

Background

California has some of the most popular beaches in the country. Over 150 million day visits are generated by tourists and residents annually to swim, wade, surf, and dive at California Beaches. Beach visitors spend over \$10 billion each year in California.

California beaches are monitored in accordance with AB411 (Statutes of 1997) the Beach Bathing Water Quality Standards and Public Notification Program ([Beach Regulation and Guidance](#)). Under the AB411 program California requires public health agencies to monitor beaches with 50,000 annual beach visitors and potential sources of fecal pollution at least weekly for Enterococcus, fecal coliform, and total coliform from April 1 through October 31st. These requirements exceed Federal regulations. Most county public health programs monitor many more sites than required by AB411. In southern California and in San Francisco, monitoring occurs year round.

In September 2008, as a result of the Budget crisis and severe shortfall in state revenues, the Governor used his line item veto authority to remove, among other things, the \$984,000 Beach Safety Program from Department of Public Health's (DPH) budget for 2008/2009. The Beach Safety Program is the DPH Beaches and Recreational Water Program. These are the funds used by DPH for the AB411 grants to local agencies to run their beach water quality monitoring programs from April 1st through Oct 31st each year (the highest months of swimming activity)

The State Water Board has made several attempts to find alternative funding for the AB411 program (without funding the extent of beach water quality monitoring will be much reduced from

historical levels). The first attempt was through our Division of Financial Assistance to utilize some remaining Proposition 50 bond funds for the two fiscal years 2008-2009 and 2009-2010. This process has not succeeded to date because the State of California's fiscal emergency precluded any bond funding becoming available since December 2008. The State Board has attempted to review options perhaps available through the Federal Stimulus to provide extra SRF program funds. This process is currently underway.

California Beach Water Quality Monitoring Program

The State Water Resources Control Board is responsible for collecting all California beach water quality monitoring data and submitting this data to US EPA annually by January 1st of each year.

The data is generated by the individual county health programs that collect, analyze and report the data. The counties are responsible for public health warnings (when collected samples exceed one of the three fecal indicator bacteria) and beach closures (when untreated sanitary sewer wastewater is projected to impact beach water quality). The county health agencies are required to report each month's data to the State Water Board by the 15th of the following month.

The county agencies inform the public on a daily basis about the water quality at its beaches. They do this through public phone hotlines, county or third party websites, and press releases. Earth 911 (<http://earth911.com/clean-boating-information/beaches911com/>) and Heal the Bay (<http://www.healthebay.org/>) are third parties which collect the county data and post it to the web either daily or weekly.

The State Water Board Beach Watch database houses the historical county data. This database can be found at: <http://beachwatch.waterboards.ca.gov/> There are reports of historical data regarding the posting and advisory information available to the public. We are attempting to provide reports and access to the historical water quality monitoring data. These will be incorporated into the Safe-to-Swim webpages.

This current data process has not worked as well as desired. Individual counties are responsible for getting their monthly data into the state database. Often county health personnel are not able to perform necessary database functions and interface successfully with the more complicated state Beach Watch system. This has created lags and gaps in data submission. In addition, at the state level some potentially useful tracking reports have not been created due to limited IT resource availability. Frequent turnover of State Water Board IT personnel has also led to difficulties in managing the data flow.

We are currently investigating a reorientation of the dataflow potentially through SCCWRP to help manage the county and the state dataflow problems. In addition, this may provide help in designing and managing our Safe-to-Swim portal and data reporting requirements for the public and US EPA.

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