



Press Release



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Tainted Water Fouling Ohio Beaches, Economy

Ohio ranks 2nd in the nation for failing to meet national health standards

COLUMBUS, OHIO – As summer temperatures soar and families flock to America's coastal beaches, they often find that an unwelcome "intruder" has beaten them to the shore: an official beach advisory, warning people not to enter the water because of dirty water contaminated with dangerous bacteria.

Along Ohio's Lake Erie coast, beach advisories are an all too frequent fixture. Last year, in fact, Ohio ranked second in the nation for the number of percent of samples that exceeded water quality standards that caused advisories, according to an annual beach water quality report released today by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the Ohio Environmental Council, and Environment Ohio.

Using the latest data from the U.S. EPA, the report, "*Testing the Waters: A Guide to Water Quality at Vacation Beaches*," tallied 657 health advisory days in 2007 for Ohio beaches, up 4% from 629 days in 2006. The report is available at www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/titinx.asp.

A beach advisory is issued when the level of bacteria in the water is higher than the maximum standard used for evaluating whether or not the water is safe to swim. Under Ohio Department of Health rules, most beach postings only advise against—but do not actually prohibit—entering the water.

"At the height of summer, nothing is more inviting than a dip in the cool waters of Lake Erie. Yet, soaring advisories are turning families and children away from the beach, all because of outdated and overwhelmed sewage and stormwater treatment systems," said Kristy Meyer, Agricultural & Clean Water Programs Managing Director for the Ohio Environmental Council.

Tainted beach water can expose beachgoers to a range of waterborne illnesses, including gastroenteritis, dysentery, hepatitis, respiratory ailments and other serious health problems. For senior citizens, small children, and people with weak immune systems, the results can be fatal.

Nationwide, sewage spills and overflows caused more than 22,000 beach closing and advisory days in 2007. In the Great Lakes, 15% of beach water samples violated public health standards, more than twice the national average, and the highest level of contamination of any coastal region in the continental U.S. Four out of the five top-risk beaches are located within the Great Lakes region: Illinois, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Indiana.

The 22,000 figure is the most since the NRDC began tracking the problem 18 years ago, confirming that our nation's beaches continue to suffer from serious water pollution. EPA beachgoer surveys in the Great Lakes confirm that waterborne illness is commonplace among swimmers. An average of 11% of swimmers surveyed at two beaches (Huntington Beach on Lake Erie, near Cleveland and Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore on Lake Michigan, near Gary, Ind.) reported contracting gastroenteritis.

Beach advisories represent not only a health hazard, but also a loss in economic revenue. Studies in Michigan have indicated economic losses ranging from \$7,935 to \$37,030 per day, due to recreational activity lost because of beach advisories.

Aging and poorly-designed sewage and stormwater systems hold much of the blame for beach water pollution. Last year, that problem was compounded by record rainfall, which added to the strain on already overloaded infrastructure. Report authors also found that poor suburban developments in coastal areas are devouring wetlands and other natural buffers such as dunes and beach grass that would otherwise help filter out dangerous pollution.

So far in 2008, beach advisory warning signs have interrupted 202 days of the summer swimming season at the 23 public Lake Erie beaches monitored by the Ohio Department of Health.

Top four 2008 Ohio's Beach advisories at a glance (June 1, 2008 – July 23, 2008):

<u>Beach</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Advisory Posting Recommended</u>
Villa Angela State Park	Cuyahoga	32
Euclid State Park	Cuyahoga	30
Lakeshore Park	Ashtabula	23
Century Beach	Lorain	14

To see the number of beach advisories for all 23 public Lake Erie beaches go to www.TheOEC.org.

"There is no reason that in the 21st century, we should withstand this type of water pollution," stated Amy Gomberg with Environment Ohio. "I hope that these dirty statistics encourage our elected officials to prioritize cleaning up our waterways."

Even beaches that meet federal health standards are not necessarily safe. The current beach water quality standards are at a minimum 20 years old and rely on obsolete monitoring methods and outdated science. Those obsolete standards don't identify all of the sources of contamination that can make people sick.

In 2000, Congress passed the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health Act (BEACH Act), which required the EPA to revise the current health standards by October 2005. The agency missed the deadline, and now says it will not be able to finish updating them until 2011.

In 2005, the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration, a collection of more than 1,500 local, state, federal and tribal governments, environmental-conservation groups, agriculture representatives, business leaders, and concerned citizens, released a Strategy To Protect and Restore the Great Lakes. This Strategy outlined manageable solutions for the problems plaguing the Great Lakes coastal areas from outdated, underfunded wastewater treatment systems, including:

- Employ real-time testing methodologies. Current methods for testing beach water pollution take 24 to 48 hours to obtain results, so beachgoers are unknowingly swimming in human and animal waste. Real-time testing takes 2 to 4 hours instead of days. Real-time testing methodologies are now available, but not yet approved by the USEPA.
- Amending the Safe Drinking Water Act to enhance flexibility in how State Revolving Funds may be used for infrastructure system improvements and fully funding the Clean Water State Revolving Fund. The Clean Water State Revolving Fund provides low interest, flexible

loans for water quality protection projects, such as sewage water system upgrades, which reduce the amount of raw sewage polluting our local beaches.

- Fully funding the BEACH Protection Act (US House Resolution 2537/US Senate Bill 2844). The BEACH Protection Act of 2008 would double the amount of money authorized for beach water protection programs and would allow for a portion of those funds to be used for tracking and correcting the sources of beach water pollution.

“Mothers shouldn’t have to worry whether or not their kids are swimming in tainted water and kids shouldn’t have to be turned away from swimming at their local beaches,” said Meyer. “We know the sources of the pollution and we have manageable solutions. It is time that we use those manageable solutions. Everyday we wait, the problems get worse and the solutions get more costly.”

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The Ohio Environmental Council (www.TheOEC.org) is a network of more than 100 state and local groups that advocate to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home.

Environment Ohio (www.environmentohio.org) a statewide, citizen-based environmental advocacy organization dedicated to protecting Ohio’s air, water and open spaces.

The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, non-profit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has more than 1.2 million members and online activists nationwide served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Santa Monica and San Francisco. More information about NRDC is available through its Web site: www.nrdc.org.