Ohio Environmental Council
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gulf Coast Oil or North Coast Bacteria—Swimmers Beware!

783 Days of Warnings for Unsafe Water Posted at Ohio Lake Erie Beaches in 2009

COLUMBUS (July 28, 2010) – Pollution continues to contaminate the water at America's beaches, causing 783 closing or advisory days in Ohio last year and 18,682 nationwide.

Meanwhile, as of July 23 the oil disaster had already led to 1,755 days of beach closing, advisories, and notices in the Gulf region this year, according to the 20th annual beachwater quality report released today by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC).

Ellen Mee, Director of Environmental Health Policy at the Ohio Environmental Council, notes that while Ohio has made some progress, the Buckeye State is ranked 27 of 30 beach states in terms of beachwater quality.

Almost all of the beach advisories for Ohio's Lake Erie beaches result from elevated bacteria levels. The sources of the bacteria are unknown, Mee observed, and that is cause for concern.

"Ohio cannot hope to reduce beachwater contamination if we don't know where it is coming from," said Mee. "It is no longer acceptable just to warn families to stay away from the water. We need to begin serious efforts to protect Ohio's beautiful beaches from continued contamination."

In its 20th year, NRDC's annual report – *Testing the Waters: A Guide to Water Quality at Vacation Beaches* – analyzes government data on beachwater testing results from 2009 at more than 3,000 beaches nationwide, and provides a 5-star rating chart for 200 of the nation's most popular beaches. The report confirms that last year, our nation's beachwater continued to suffer from serious contamination – including human and animal waste – and a concerted effort to control future pollution is required.

"From stomach-turning pathogens to dangerous oil slicks – America's beaches continue to suffer from pollution that can make people sick, harm marine life and destroy coastal economies," said NRDC Water Program Director David Beckman. "And as the disaster of unprecedented scale continues in the Gulf, we must clean up the mess, stop it from happening again, and make sure the communities bearing the brunt are not forgotten."

This year the report also includes a special section dedicated to oil-related beach closures, advisories, and notices in the Gulf region this summer. For the full report, go to www.nrdc.org/beaches.

OHIO & NATIONAL FINDINGS

This year's report found that 7 percent of beachwater samples nationwide in 2009 violated health standards, showing no improvement from the previous two years. In Ohio, the percentage of health standard exceedances decreased to 17 percent in 2009 from 21 percent in 2008.

The NRDC report identifies 60 Great Lakes beaches with more than 25% of samples exceeding health standards. Fifteen of those beaches are in Ohio, including 9 beaches in Cuyahoga County. Forty percent of the samples from Villa Angela Beach, also in Cuyahoga County, exceeded health standards. From 2006 to 2009, more 25% of the samples from Villa Angela beach exceeded health standards.

Ohio Beaches with More Than 25% of Samples Exceeding the EPA's Single-Sample Maximum Standard for Designated Beach Areas in 2009 (Limited to Beaches with at least 10 total Samples Reported for the Year)

County	Beach	Tier	Monitoring Frequency	Total Samples	Percent Exceedance
Ashtabula	Lakeshore Park	1	4/wk	50	34%
Cuyahoga	Villa Angela State Park	1	daily	114	40%
Cuyahoga	Edgecliff Beach	2	1/wk	13	38%
Cuyahoga	Euclid State Park	1	daily	114	38%
Cuyahoga	Arcadia Beach	2	1/wk	14	36%
Cuyahoga	Noble Beach	2	1/wk	14	36%
Cuyahoga	Shoreby Club Beach	2	1/wk	14	36%
Cuyahoga	Sims Beach	2	1/wk	14	36%
Cuyahoga	Moss Point Beach	2	1/wk	14	29%
Cuyahoga	Edgewater State Park	1	Daily	110	26%
Erie	Crystal Rock	1	3/wk	44	32%
Erie	Edison Creek	1	3/wk	44	32%
Erie	Sherod Creek	1	3/wk	44	27%
Erie	Vermillion River West	1	3/wk	43	26%
Lorain	Century Beach	1	4/wk	49	27%

A beach advisory is issued in Ohio when the level of *E. coli* 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.

The use of *E. coli* as an indicator is a useful approach, observed Sandy Bihn, the Western Lake Erie Waterkeeper, but doesn't provide the public with information about the range of risks that may be present in the waters of Ohio's recreational beaches. Current monitoring protocol, for example, doesn't include advisories due to the toxic algae blooms currently plaguing Lake Erie.

In 2009, stormwater runoff was the primary known source of pollution at beaches nationwide, consistent with past years. The report indicates polluted runoff continues to be a serious problem that has not been addressed.

And, in Ohio, Mee explains, we have to be concerned not only about urban runoff, but agricultural stormwater runoff, as well. Runoff from application of manure and fertilizers on

croplands on and near the tributaries flowing into Lake Eric contribute to the bacterial load and other contaminants in Lake Erie.

By better regulating agricultural runoff and using a wealth of available, smart water solutions on land – collectively called "green infrastructure" – we can naturally control and treat stormwater pollution, as well as prevent sewage overflows, to keep waste from reaching the beach. Green infrastructure refers to a variety of practices – such as green roofs, permeable pavement, roadside plantings and rain barrels – that stop rainwater where it falls and either store it for later use or allow it to soak back into the ground.

"Relying on dry weather to keep our beachwater clean is not a long-term public health protection strategy – when the rains return, so will the pollution," said Beckman. "Green infrastructure techniques on land can make a real difference in the water – and they're often the cheapest and most effective way to improve beachwater quality. From green roofs to permeable pavement and roadside plantings, there's a whole host of ways to not only prevent runoff pollution and sewage overflows from the start – but to beautify neighborhoods, boost economies and support American jobs at the same time."

Beachwater pollution nationwide causes a range of waterborne illnesses in swimmers including stomach flu, skin rashes, pinkeye, ear, nose and throat problems, dysentery, hepatitis, respiratory ailments, neurological disorders and other serious health problems. For senior citizens, small children and people with weak immune systems, the results can be fatal. The incidence of infections has been steadily growing over the past several decades, and with coastal populations growing we can expect this upward trend to continue until the pollution sources are addressed.

"Sewage and runoff pollution in our beachwater is preventable," said Jon Devine, senior NRDC water attorney. "With investment in cost-effective, smarter water practices that are available today, communities can tackle the most common sources of pollution lurking in the waves."

OIL SPILL IMPACT ON GULF BEACHES:

As oil washes ashore, closures, advisories and notices have been issued at many Gulf beaches – in fact, nearly 10 times as many closing and advisory days as were issued at these beaches for any reason by this time last year. Specifically, as of July 23, 49 of the 253 beaches regularly tested for water quality had issued oil warnings, resulting in a total of 1,755 beach closings, advisories, and notices in the Gulf region as of the result of the disaster. Those same beaches had only issued 205 closings and advisories at this time last year for any reason.

NRDC is maintaining a frequently updated map of current oil spill beach closures, advisories, and notices, which can be accessed here: http://www.nrdc.org/energy/gulfspill/beaches.asp.

TESTING THE WATERS, 20th EDITION - A LOOK BACK:

Since NRDC released its first *Testing the Waters* report, there have been significant improvements in beachwater testing and reporting. In 1991, of the ten states included in NRDC's first edition of *Testing the Waters*, only Delaware, Maine, New Jersey and Rhode Island reported weekly monitoring of bacteria at some of their beaches. Due in large part to NRDC advocacy, nearly 3,000 coastal beaches, representing beaches in all 30 coastal states, are now monitoring at least weekly, if not more.

Also, twenty years ago, water quality monitoring records were not necessarily kept, even for states that conducted monitoring. Today, detailed information about beachwater quality is in most states, including Ohio, available online. States are also now applying more consistent

water quality standards to beach closure and advisory decisions, and they are tying beach status more clearly to bacteria levels – a shift that provides better protection of public health.

SOLUTIONS:

There are several things the government and citizens can do to create healthier summers at the beach:

- Boosting green infrastructure in coastal communities can prevent stormwater runoff and sewage overflows from the start. These solutions not only clean up waterways, they literally green communities, cool and cleanse the air, reduce asthma and heat-related illnesses, save on heating and cooling energy costs, and generate landscaping and construction jobs. A bill recently introduced in Congress, the Green Infrastructure for Clean Water Act (H.R. 4202/S. 3561), aims to make green infrastructure and low impact development techniques a national priority.

- Simple steps in your everyday life can also make a difference in reducing beachwater pollution. This includes conserving water, planting trees, redirecting drainage pipes toward gardens or vegetation, maintaining septic systems, and properly disposing of animal waste, litter, toxic household products, and used motor oil. Your support for efforts to educate the public, implement projects to reduce the flow of pollutants into the water, and oversight of green infrastructure projects can go a long way toward protecting our waters and encouraging low-impact practices.

- Better testing and identification of contamination sources can help protect public health and address the causes. The Clean Coastal Environment and Public Health Act (H.R. 2093/S. 878), pending in Congress would enable better identification of pollution sources – which are often not investigated and therefore unknown – so they can be addressed. The bill would also require EPA to adopt faster testing methods to enable officials to issue prompter closings and advisories in the event of contamination. This would allow people to find out if it's safe to swim before they get in, not after – as is often the case today with slower testing methods.

- By cutting global warming pollution we can help avoid greater beachwater pollution in the future. The U.S. House of Representatives has already passed, and the Senate is now considering, climate and clean energy legislation that would do just that, as well as help us transition to clean energy, and create millions of jobs at the same time. Since global warming is expected to increase pathogens in the water and stormwater runoff – as a result of increased floods and storms – passing legislation to minimize these impacts can help avoid beach pollution.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- For the full report, go to: www.nrdc.org/beaches http://www.nrdc.org/beaches.
- For a regularly updated map of Gulf beach closures due to oil, go to: http://www.nrdc.org/energy/gulfspill/beaches.asp.
- For tips for a safe trip to the beach this summer, go to: http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/gttw.asp.
- For 2010 beachwater monitoring reports, go to http://www.odh.ohio.gov/odhprograms/eh/bbeach/beach_samplemonitoring. aspx
- For a special report on the Great Lakes beaches, go to: http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/greatlakes.pdf

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (www.NRDC.org) is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing.

The mission of the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) is to secure healthy air, land, and water for all who call Ohio home. The OEC is Ohio's leading advocate for fresh air, clean water, and sustainable land use. The OEC has a 40-year history of innovation, pragmatism, and success. Using legislative initiatives, legal action, scientific principles, and statewide partnerships, the OEC secures a healthier environment for Ohio's families and communities. For more information, visit www.theOEC.org.