



## PRESS RELEASE

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Report shows continued high rate of closures and swimming advisories at our nation's beaches  
Santa Barbara beaches fare slightly better

Santa Barbara, CA – Beach closures and advisories due to hazardous bacterial contamination are on the rise at many of our nation's beaches, according to an annual beach report released today by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC). "Testing the Waters: A Guide to Water Quality at Vacation Beaches" reports that nationwide there were nearly 20,000 days of beach closures and advisories at ocean and Great Lakes beaches last year – an increase of nine percent from 2003. (For the complete report, go to <http://www.nrdc.org/water/oceans/ttw/titinx.asp>.)

Santa Barbara beaches, on the other hand, showed some improvement from previous years. According to the report, Santa Barbara County had 330 beach closing and advisory days in 2004, an eight percent decrease from 2003, when we had 360 closing/advisory days. In fact, this figure has decreased for five consecutive years, with an overall decrease of 64 percent since 2000.

Ventura County beaches also fared better this year than last, showing a 37 percent decrease in the number of beach closing and advisory days – 452 in 2004, down from 720 in 2003. In California overall, the number of beach closing/advisory days decreased by 26 percent in 2004 to 3,985, from 5,384 in 2003.

This improvement, however, is no reason for complacency, according to Kira Schmidt, Executive Director of Santa Barbara Channelkeeper, a local environmental group. "While our beaches fared slightly better than last year, the number of beach closings and advisories we have in Santa Barbara is still far too high," she said. "Thousands of Santa Barbara residents and visitors frequent our beaches year-round to enjoy the sun, the sand, and the surf. Too often they have to stay out of the water or risk getting sick," said Schmidt. Beach closures also cost the local economy in lost tourism dollars, as well as due to swimming-related illnesses.

"Instead of closing our beaches, let's clean up the water," said Anjali Jaiswal, an attorney in NRDC's Coastal Water Quality Project. "Authorities have gotten better at finding the problem. Now they need to stop the pollution at its source by repairing and replacing leaky sewage and septic systems, and cleaning up contaminated runoff. That's the only way to protect public health, the environment and Santa Barbara's tourist-based economy."

East Beach at Mission Creek again topped the list of Santa Barbara beaches with the highest number of closing and advisory days, at 77 in 2004 (a more than 100 percent increase from 2003). Arroyo Burro and East Beach at Sycamore Creek came in second and third, with 35 and 29 closing/advisory days, respectively.

All beach closings and advisories in Santa Barbara County last year were due to monitoring that revealed elevated bacteria levels. However, one of the report's most disturbing findings is that the sources of pollution causing or contributing to most of these closings and advisories were unknown. Nationwide, this figure was 73 percent – the highest rate of “unknown” sources in the 15 years NRDC has been issuing the survey. “We know that the high bacteria levels that cause most closures and advisories typically come from two sources – inadequately treated sewage and contaminated stormwater,” said Ms. Schmidt of Channelkeeper.

She noted that the City of Santa Barbara is undertaking efforts to address problems with our sewer system, such as forwarding a proposed ordinance to require inspections of private sewer laterals, yet Santa Barbara still suffers from excessive sewage spills, particularly when it rains, and more needs to be done to address this problem.

Stormwater pollution threatens our beaches during wet weather and dry weather. Every time it rains, rainwater runs over dirty streets, rooftops, parking lots and lawns and picks up a wide variety of pollutants, including disease-causing pathogens, gasoline and lubricants, pesticides, fertilizers, trash, sediment and heavy metals. During dry weather, activities such as construction, lawn watering and car washing send polluted water down storm drains. This polluted runoff does not undergo treatment like sewage does, but flows untreated directly to our creeks and ocean, often leading to beach advisories. Stormwater is the leading source of pollution to our coastal waters, and the fastest growing one, and state and federal laws are now requiring cities to implement plans to address it.

The County of Santa Barbara and the Cities of Goleta, Santa Barbara and Carpinteria are currently developing Storm Water Management Programs, required under state and federal laws to reduce the discharge of pollutants in stormwater to the “maximum extent practicable” to protect water quality. Ms. Schmidt emphasized that, while local authorities do monitor water quality at many local beaches and are trying to get a handle on stormwater pollution, they must now amplify those efforts and develop and implement rigorous Storm Water Management Programs that have some teeth and a wider array of tools to more effectively prevent the stormwater pollution that continues to plague our beaches, threaten public health and harm marine life.

The link between urbanization and coastal water pollution raises a concern for rapidly growing Santa Barbara region and other communities along California's central coast. “Santa Barbara is located along some of the most beautiful coastlines in the world, and they're developing fast,” said Ms. Jaiswal. “It's critical that Santa Barbara implement strong water pollution control measures before their beaches become as contaminated as those in Southern California.”

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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 million e-activists and members nationwide served from offices in New York, Washington, D.C., Santa Monica and San Francisco. More information about NRDC is available at its Web site: [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper is dedicated to protecting and restoring the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds. We work on the water and in the community to monitor local waterways, restore aquatic ecosystems, advocate for clean water, enforce environmental laws, and educate and engage citizens in identifying and devising solutions to local pollution problems. For more information, visit our website at [www.sbck.org](http://www.sbck.org).