

## Eye on the Environment: Ventura County keeps its beach water clean

By Arne Anselm  
Eye on the Environment

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Ventura County's beach water quality is outstanding. Bacteria testing to identify potential health risks has again revealed that Ventura County has some of the best ocean water quality in the state.

The monitoring is performed by the Ventura County Environmental Health Division. Each week, 40 public beaches are sampled along the 42 miles of Ventura County coastline. The sample sites are selected based on where people are most likely to be, not where the best or worst result may be expected.

The environmental organization Heal the Bay summarizes the results and others across the state in its annual Beach Report Card, giving letter grades to beaches based on bacteria levels found. This year, Ventura County beaches earned straight A's during dry weather, with more than two-thirds getting an A plus. Even in wet weather, when rain was flowing down gutters and carrying anything it could pick up, Ventura County beaches were outstanding, with only two scoring lower than a B.

The bacteria measured at beaches do not cause illness themselves but indicate the likely presence of pathogens that could cause illness if ingested. The results, however, may be overstating the risk to swimmers if the sources of the indicator bacteria are mostly from birds or other wildlife, not humans.

Understanding the level of risk is important information that may save thousands of tax dollars from fixing a perceived problem that does not really exist. New science techniques are becoming available to identify the sources of bacteria and the threats they pose to swimmers.

One of the two underperforming Ventura County beaches is currently being evaluated as a candidate for a special study using these techniques to more accurately determine the risk to swimmers. This could be the first time this cutting edge science has been used on the West Coast.

It doesn't, however, take cutting-edge science to understand why water quality in Ventura County is so good. Good water quality comes from good people, and the people of Ventura County are good to their watersheds. Everyone deserves recognition for not using streets and gutters as ashtrays, waste baskets or sewers. From inland cities to the coast, they help keep the ocean clean and healthy with these common practices:

n Picking up pet waste, discarded food and diapers: They seem natural but are sources of bacteria that can make people sick. Pick up after your dog and dispose the waste properly in trash cans. The same is true for baby diapers and food waste. Keep the trash lids tight so these items won't accidentally become part of the watershed.

n Not littering: Food wrappers and cigarette butts dropped into gutters and washed into storm drains can harm the watershed. Litter can also come from uncovered trash bins with the help of wind or hungry seagulls. Make sure items in truck beds are covered or tightly secured, and pick up water bottles or other litter that may fall out of your car.

n Conserving water: Overwatering provides a highway for pollutants and bacteria to enter the watershed and eventually the ocean. Designed to kill, residential landscaping

chemicals are seriously harmful to the environment. They are often washed into the gutter by overwatering. To avoid runoff, do not overwater and do not apply pesticides, weed killers or fertilizers before a rain.

Congratulations, Ventura County. Because you do such a good job keeping an eye on the environment, we will be able to enjoy our clean beaches for years to come.

**On the Net:**

<http://www.cleanwatershed.org>

<http://www.healthebay.org/blogs-news/heal-bays-2012-beach-report-card>.

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