



EPA's BEACH Report: Washington 2010 Swimming Season

May 2011

Introduction

The BEACH Act of 2000 requires that coastal and Great Lakes states, territories, and tribes report to EPA on beach monitoring and notification data for their coastal recreation waters. The BEACH Act defines coastal recreation waters as the Great Lakes and coastal waters (including coastal estuaries) that states, territories, and authorized tribes officially recognize or designate for swimming, bathing, surfing, or similar activities in the water.

This fact sheet summarizes beach monitoring and notification data submitted to EPA by the State of Washington for the 2010 swimming season.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day each year, the Washington BEACH Program monitors fecal bacteria at approximately 47 saltwater beaches. The Program is managed collaboratively by the State Departments of Ecology and Health and implemented through the cooperative efforts of local health jurisdictions, tribal nations, non-profit organizations, and volunteers. There are more than 100 people involved in implementing Washington's BEACH Program.

Bacteria levels at Washington's marine waters are typically very low with 58 percent of samples showing bacteria levels below the detection limit in 2010. Beaches that exceed water quality standards are usually shallow enclosed bays close to urban areas. The Washington BEACH Program implements several strategies to protect beachgoers from bacteria related illness and improve water quality. In addition to monitoring and notification, it identifies beaches with chronic problems and assists local health jurisdictions in fixing those problems. For instance, in the fall of 2008, Purdy Sandspit County Park was closed after identification of failing on-site septic systems near the beach. The Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department worked to address concerns and correct on-site problems, and the beach was reopened in July 2010. Additionally, Larrabee State Park has had recurring high bacteria results for several seasons. Failing septic systems near the beach were corrected and the park's sewage treatment plant was replaced with an upgraded system but bacteria counts continued to be high. In 2010, the BEACH Program met with partners in Whatcom County—the Whatcom County Health Department, Larrabee State Park Ranger, local Surfrider chapter, and State Department of Ecology's wastewater treatment plant permit manager—to assess contamination sources and develop plans for moving forward. 2011 plans include an education and outreach initiative and continued source investigation.

Figure 1. Washington coastal counties.

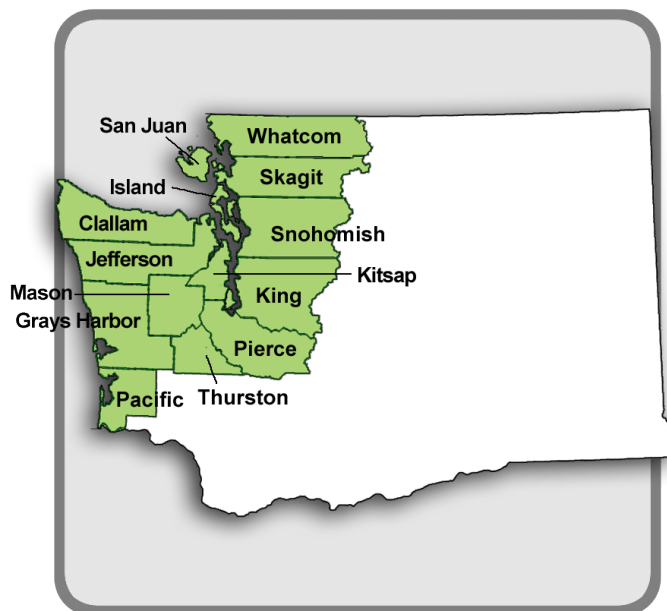


Table 1. Breakdown of monitored and unmonitored coastal beaches by county for 2010.

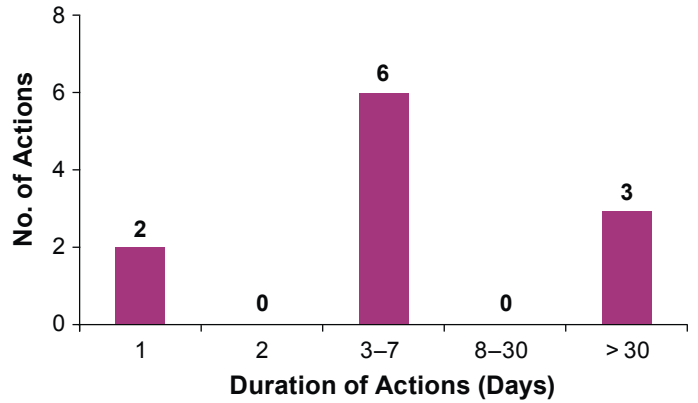
County	Total Beaches	Monitored	Not Monitored
CLALLAM	88	4	84
GRAYS HARBOR	69	3	66
ISLAND	114	3	111
JEFFERSON	122	3	119
KING	99	7	92
KITSAP	193	8	185
MASON	70	2	68
PACIFIC	59	0	59
PIERCE	138	5	133
SAN JUAN	218	0	218
SKAGIT	65	1	64
SNOHOMISH	42	7	35
THURSTON	41	1	40
WHATCOM	50	3	47
TOTALS	1,368	47	1,321

2010 Summary Results

How many notification actions were reported and how long were they?

When water quality standards are exceeded at a particular beach, Washington issues a water contact advisory. Sewage spills usually trigger a closure. A total of nine monitored beaches had at least one advisory issued during the 2010 swimming season. Figure 2 presents a breakdown of notification action durations. This graph does not include three permanent advisories and one sewage spill closure that occurred during the swimming season, as those beaches were not monitored in 2010.

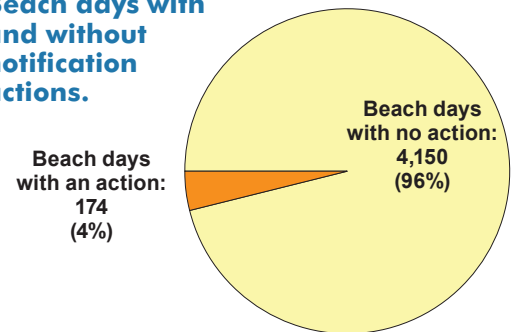
Figure 2: Beach notification actions by duration.



What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?

For Washington's 2010 swimming season, actions were reported about four percent of the time (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Beach days with and without notification actions.



How do 2010 results compare to previous years?

Table 2 compares 2010 notification action data with monitored beach data from previous years.

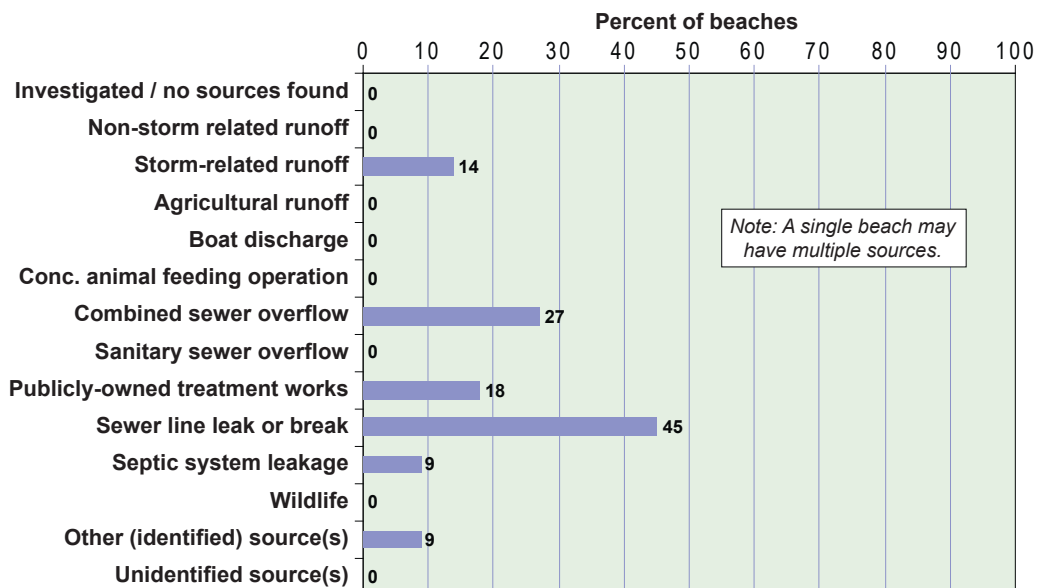
Table 2. Beach notification actions, 2008-2010.

	2008	2009	2010
Number of monitored beaches	56	68	47
Number of beaches affected by notification actions	11	8	9
Percentage of beaches affected by notification actions	20%	12%	19%
Percentage of beach days affected by notification actions	2%	2%	4%

What pollution sources possibly affect investigated monitored beaches?

Figure 4 displays the percentage of Washington's investigated monitored beaches possibly affected by various pollution sources. In 2010, 45 percent of the beaches reported that possible sources included a sewer line leak or break.

Figure 4: Percent of investigated monitored beaches affected by possible pollution sources (22 beaches).



For More Information

For general information about beaches:

www.epa.gov/beaches/

For information about beaches in Washington:

www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/eap/beach/