



EPA's BEACH Report: Washington 2009 Swimming Season

May 2010

Introduction

The BEACH Act of 2000 requires that coastal and Great Lakes states and territories 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 2009 swimming season.

Between Memorial Day and Labor Day each year, the Washington BEACH Program monitors fecal bacteria at approximately 70 saltwater beaches. The Program is managed collaboratively by the State Departments of Ecology and Health and accomplished 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 63 percent of samples showing bacteria levels below the detection limit. 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. The Washington BEACH Program has successfully conducted investigations of contamination sources and worked with shoreline communities to identify and correct bacteria problems. For instance, at Freeland County Park in Island County high bacteria levels prompted closing shellfish harvesting in March, 2006 and swimming in June, 2006. In March, 2007 the Island County Commissioners established a Shellfish Protection District and increased monitoring and pollution source identification and remediation. A public outreach effort included cleaning up septic systems, pet waste, agricultural issues, business and residential practices that contribute to pollution. Although the shellfish closure remains in effect, the beach was reopened to swimming September 10, 2008.

Figure 1. Washington coastal counties.



Table 1. Breakdown of monitored and unmonitored coastal beaches by county for 2009.

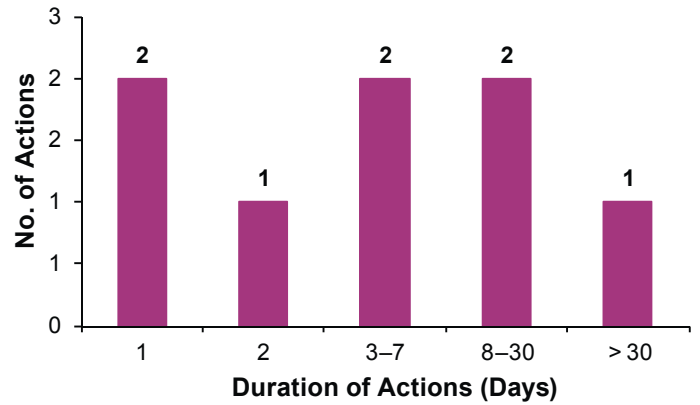
County	Total Beaches	Monitored	Not Monitored
CLALLAM	80	9	71
GRAYS HARBOR	71	4	67
ISLAND	111	3	108
JEFFERSON	121	5	116
KING	90	11	79
KIITSAP	183	9	174
MASON	70	4	66
PACIFIC	59	0	59
PIERCE	136	7	129
SAN JUAN	218	0	218
SKAGIT	64	3	61
SNOHOMISH	42	8	34
THURSTON	39	1	38
WHATCOM	50	4	46
TOTALS	1,334	68	1,266

2009 Summary Results

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

When water quality standards are exceeded at a particular beach, Washington’s approach is to issue a beach advisory that warns people to avoid contact with the water. A total of 8 monitored beaches had at least one advisory issued during the 2009 swimming season. Figure 2 presents a breakdown of notification action durations. (This graph does not include four beaches that are permanently posted with advisories, two beaches posted for advisories that occurred outside of the swim season.)

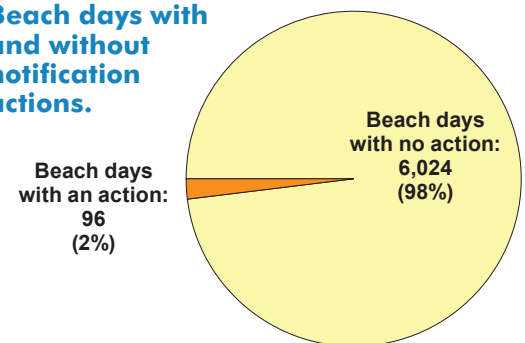
Figure 2: Beach notification actions by duration.



What percentage of days were beaches under a notification action?

For Washington’s 2009 swimming season, actions were reported about 2 percent of the time (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Beach days with and without notification actions.



How do 2009 results compare to previous years?

Table 2 compares 2009 notification action data with monitored beach data from previous years.

What pollution sources possibly affect investigated monitored beaches?

Washington did not report investigations of monitored beaches to EPA.

Table 2. Beach notification actions, 2007–2009.

	2007	2008	2009
Number of monitored beaches	65	56	68
Number of beaches affected by notification actions	8	11	8
Percentage of beaches affected by notification actions	12%	20%	12%
Percentage of beach days affected by notification actions	3%	2%	2%

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/