



ALABAMA

21st in Beachwater Quality

10% of samples exceeded national standards in 2010

Polluted urban and suburban runoff is a major threat to water quality at the nation's coastal beaches. Runoff from storms and irrigation carries pollution from parking lots, yards, and streets directly to waterways. In some parts of the country, stormwater routinely causes overflows from sewage systems. Innovative solutions known as green infrastructure enable communities to naturally absorb or use runoff before it causes problems. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is modernizing its national rules for sources of runoff pollution and should develop strong, green infrastructure-based requirements.

Alabama has 97 coastal beaches stretching along 50 miles of Gulf of Mexico coast and 70 miles of bay and island shoreline. The Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) administers the state's beachwater quality monitoring program.

During 2010, Alabama's beaches were impacted by the BP oil disaster. A total of 1,661 advisory days at 30 beaches were issued due to the spill. Shoreline Contamination Assessment Teams were working seven days a week on cleanup and warning signs were still posted at all of Alabama's Gulf Coast beaches into 2011 because of the occasional presence of tar mats and tar balls from the spill.² NRDC includes oil spill advisory days at all beaches in its oil spill totals, including advisory days at beaches that were not monitored for bacteria in 2010. Ten of the beaches with oil spill advisories were monitored for bacteria in 2010.

Monitoring Results

In 2010 Alabama reported 97 coastal beaches. Of these, 8 (8%) were monitored more than once a week, 12 (12%) once a week, and 5 (5%) every two weeks. 72 (74%) were not monitored. For this section of the report, NRDC looked at the percent of monitoring samples that exceeded the state's daily maximum bacterial standards (all reported samples were used to calculate the 2010 percent exceedance rates, including duplicate samples and samples taken outside the official beach season). In 2010, 10% of all reported beach monitoring samples exceeded the state's daily maximum bacterial standards. The beaches with the highest percent exceedance rates in 2010 were Mary Ann Nelson Beach (35%) and Pirate's Cove (22%) in Baldwin County; Dog River, Alba Club in Mobile County (21%), and Spanish Cove in Baldwin County (20%).

Sampling Practices: Monitoring is conducted throughout the year, with more frequent monitoring from May to September.

ADEM, along with the Alabama Department of Public Health and US EPA, determines sampling practices, locations, standards, and notification protocols and practices throughout the state. Samples are usually collected in knee-deep water, 6 to 12 inches below the surface. Beach tier and monitoring frequency are determined using a quantitative ranking scheme that weighs three factors: the amount of use, a measure of risk, and the presence of important factors such as high use by the elderly or the very young.¹

Once an exceedance is reported, samples are collected daily until the standard is met.² States that monitor more frequently after an exceedance is found will tend to have higher percent exceedance rates and lower total advisory days than they would if their sampling schedule was not altered after an exceedance was found.

KEY FINDINGS IN ALABAMA

Beachwater Contamination

(% of samples exceeding state standards in 2010)

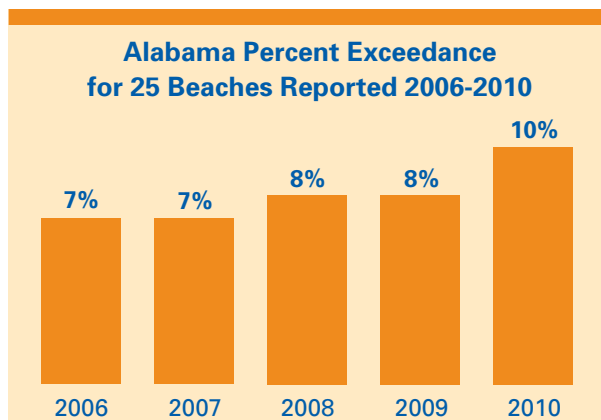
- Mary Ann Nelson Beach in Baldwin County (35%)
- Pirate's Cove in Baldwin County (22%)
- Dog River, Alba Club in Mobile County (21%)
- Spanish Cove in Baldwin County (20%)

Reported Sources of Beachwater Contamination Statewide (number of closing/advisory days)

- 36 (100%) unknown sources of contamination

Advisories

Because of the BP oil disaster, total advisory days for 28 events lasting six consecutive weeks or less increased more than 5-fold to 195 days in 2010 from 34 in 2009. For prior years, there were 14 advisory days in 2008, 30 days in 2007, 44 days in 2006, and 27 days in 2005. Not counting beach advisories due to the BP oil disaster, the number of advisory days in 2010 would have been 36, essentially the same as in 2009. There were 19 extended (1,502 days) and no permanent events in 2010. All extended advisories were due to the oil spill. Extended events are those in effect more than six weeks but not more than 13 consecutive weeks; permanent events are in effect for more than 13 consecutive weeks. For the 28 events lasting six consecutive weeks or less, 18% (36) of closing/advisory days in 2010 were due to monitoring that revealed elevated bacteria levels, and 82% (159) were preemptive (i.e., without waiting for monitoring results) due to the BP oil disaster.



Standards and Procedures: Alabama does not order beach closings; the state's policy is to issue advisories only.² An enterococcus single-sample maximum of 104 cfu/100ml is the standard used to issue beach advisories in Alabama.

Beaches are given green status when sampling results meet the standard. When sample results exceed the standard, the status changes to yellow. Yellow status indicates that there may be an increased risk of illness associated with swimming in such water, and that the beach is being immediately retested. When a sample exceeds the standard, there are no overriding factors that can be taken into account before an advisory is issued. If a resample, taken the next day, also exceeds the standard, a public health advisory (red status) is issued. Red status indicates that resampling has revealed enterococcus levels greater than the threshold.²

There are no standards that mandate preemptive advisories in response to rainfall or sewage spills, but full-scale advisories for all sites have been issued by the county and state health departments after hurricanes and during the 2010 BP oil disaster.³

Alabama 2010 Monitoring Results and Closing or Advisory Days					
Beach	Tier	Assigned Monitoring Frequency	Total Samples	% of Samples Exceeding State Standards	Closing or Advisory Days
Baldwin County					
10th Street Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
13th Street Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
5th Street Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
6th Street Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
7th Street Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Alabama Point (Gulf of Mexico)	2	1/wk	21	0%	0 (56)*
Anderson Street	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Bear Point Civic Association	3	2/mo	19	5%	0
Bernard Court	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge	3	2/mo	14	0%	0 (56)*
Camp Beckwith	1	2/wk	64	9%	5
Camp Dixie	1	2/wk	52	2%	0

Beach	Tier	Assigned Monitoring Frequency	Total Samples	% of Samples Exceeding State Standards	Closing or Advisory Days
Baldwin County					
Cotton Bayou	1	2/wk	36	0%	0 (56)*
Escambia Avenue	3	2/mo	19	0%	0
Fairhope Public Beach	1	2/wk	64	16%	6
Florida Point	1	2/wk	36	0%	0 (56)*
Fort Morgan National Park	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Fort Morgan Public Beach	3	2/mo	14	0%	0 (56)*
Gore Road	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Gulf Shores Public Beach	1	2/wk	36	0%	0 (56)*
Gulf State Park–Pavilion	1	2/wk	36	0%	0 (56)*
Kee Avenue	2	1/wk	44	9%	1
Little Lagoon Pass Beach	2	1/wk	21	0%	0 (56)*
Mary Ann Nelson Beach	3	2/mo	23	35%	5
May Day Park	2	1/wk	5	20%	0
Orange Beach Waterfront Park	2	1/wk	36	11%	0
Orange Street Pier/Beach	2	1/wk	38	16%	1
Our Road	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Pellican Pt.	no tier	None	0	NA	53
Pirate’s Cove	1	2/wk	68	22%	4
Ponce De Leon Annex	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Ponce De Leon Court Lot 35	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Ponce De Leon Court Lot 50	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Ponce De Leon Court Lot 51	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Ponce De Leon Dr Access East	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Ponce De Leon Dr Public Access	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
Romar Beach	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (56)*
South Wilson Blvd	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (51)*
Spanish Cove	2	1/wk	51	20%	2
Volanta Avenue	2	1/wk	40	15%	2
Wolf Bay Lodge	no tier	None	0	NA	0 (51)*
Beaches in Baldwin County that were not monitored and that had no closing or advisory days in 2010:					
Alabama Point (Perdido Pass)	Buchanan Street Access	Holly Ave.	Morgantown Park		
Barklay Ave.	Cabana Beach Association	Josaphine Park	Mullet Dr.		
Battles Rd	Camp Baldwin	Koa Campground	Murphy Lane		
Bay Ave.	Cedar St.	Lafite Road	N. Mobile St/Perdido Ave.		
Bay Front Park (Daphne)	Cedar St. E	Laine Court Park	Navy Cove		
Bay Side Drive	Choctaw Road North	Live Oak	North Road		
Bayou Drive	Cypress Ave.	Marjon Lane	Oak St. #91		
Belrose Ave. Daphne	Fish Trap Access	Mcdonald Ave.	Palmetto Ave.		
Boggy Point	Gulf Coast Remainder	Mobile Ave.	Pensacola Ave.		
Boykin Street Access	Haupt Road	Montgomery Ave.	Perdido Bay Rec. Beach		

Beach	Tier	Assigned Monitoring Frequency	Total Samples	% of Samples Exceeding State Standards	Closing or Advisory Days
Baldwin County					
Beaches in Baldwin County that were not monitored and that had no closing or advisory days in 2010:					
Pinewood Ave.	Sea Cliff Dr.	Landing	Wydell St.		
Randolf Rd.	Seabright Ave.	Sunset Dr.	Yupon Ave.		
Rester St.	Sibley St/Steadmans	Village Pt. Foundation	Zundall Lane		
Mobile County					
Bay Front Park	no tier	None	0	NA	0
Dauphin Island East End	2	1/wk	22	9%	53
Dauphin Island Public Beach	2	1/wk	20	0%	53
Dog River, Alba Club	2	1/wk	39	21%	7
Fowl River at Highway 193	2	1/wk	37	8%	3

*Reported closing or advisory days are for events lasting six consecutive weeks or less. Number of days in parentheses are for events lasting more than six consecutive weeks.

NOTES

- 1 Baldwin County Health Department, Risk Based Beach Evaluation and Ranking, not dated.
- 2 Alabama Dept. of Env. Mgt./Alabama Dept. Public Health. Coastal Alabama Beach Monitoring Program. <http://adem.alabama.gov/programs/coastal/beachMonitoring.cnt>. Accessed in June 2011.
- 3 Suzi Rice, Senior Environmental Scientist, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, personal communication, February 2011.

Testing the Waters 2011 reflects data as of June 27, 2011.