



DEC NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EPA signs bacteria rule for water quality standards

Nov. 8, 2004-- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today put into effect new bacteria criteria for Alaska's marine waters. Alaska is one of 22 coastal and Great Lakes states that have not yet adopted EPA's recommended bacteria criteria for its water quality standards by April 10, 2004, as required by the federal Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act of 2000. EPA's action will have minimal impact in Alaska.

The Beach Act was enacted largely because of concerns about sewage contaminated water at high use recreational beaches. Compared to the states for which this act was created, Alaska has very few recreational beaches that are heavily impacted by humans. Though adjustments are required to bring Alaska's water quality standards in line with national criteria, Alaska's current standard is protective of beach users.

The new federal requirement is based upon research that suggests the pathogen enterococci, rather than fecal coliform, is a better indicator of whether people would become ill when exposed to contaminated recreational waters. The EPA rule requires states to use the enterococci indicator. Alaska's current standard is based on the criterion for shellfish harvesting use, which is more protective than the water recreation criteria in the new federal rule.

"We are confident that Alaska's beaches are safe for public use and that working closely with EPA will again find us well within that protective threshold," said Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Acting Commissioner Kurt Fredriksson.

"Alaska began developing a state specific recreational criterion for bacteria earlier this year. However, like many other states, Alaska decided it should wait until EPA clarifies its expectations through this new rule," said Nancy Sonafrank, DEC's water quality standards section manager.

EPA's action does not prevent states from adopting criteria based upon EPA guidance, which may replace this federal rule with EPA's approval.

To view the current state Water Quality Standards, go to DEC's website at:
<http://www.state.ak.us/dec/regulations/pdfs/70mas.pdf>

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