



State of Alaska
Department of Environmental Conservation



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DEC Reports Elevated Bacteria Levels at Four Coastal Areas in Ketchikan

(KETCHIKAN, AK) — The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has confirmed enterococci bacteria levels remain above criteria at four coastal areas in Ketchikan.

Since July 18, DEC has been collecting water quality samples at nine coastal areas, including: South Refuge Cove Beach, Seaport Beach, Rotary Park Beach also known as Bugges Beach, Thomas Basin, Beacon Hill, Knudson Cove, South Point Higgins Beach, Sunset Beach, and Shull Beach.

Samples collected at the following locations on August 22 and 23 exceed water quality criteria:

- Rotary Park Beach also known as Bugges Beach (located approximately 3.4 miles south of town on South Tongass Highway)
- Thomas Basin (at Creek Street Bridge)
- Seaport Beach (near Saxman)
- Knudson Cove (north of Ketchikan)

All five other tested locations meet water quality criteria. DEC plans to continue weekly sampling. Advisories for the affected beaches will remain in effect until bacteria levels for all beaches are within acceptable levels.

Contact with water impacted by fecal bacteria may cause stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye, and skin infections. The beach sampling program uses enterococci as an indicator for fecal bacteria in marine waters. Continued precautionary measures are advised. DEC recommends beach users avoid exposure, such as avoiding swimming in the water, washing after contact with the water, and rinsing fish with clean water after they have been harvested from the area. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy pathogens.

Enterococci bacteria can come from any warm blooded animal, including birds, seals, and dogs, as well as humans. Potential sources of this bacteria in Ketchikan may include wildlife and pet

feces, human waste from private or municipal treatment systems, sewer line leakage, and/or boats in harbor areas. Additional DNA marker testing is being conducted to help determine the bacteria source(s). Results are anticipated in mid-September.

The beach sampling program is being implemented by DEC. It is part of a nationwide effort to decrease the incidence of water-borne illness at public beaches under the federal Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act, funded by an EPA BEACH grant.

For more information about the Alaska beach monitoring program, visit the Alaska BEACH Grant Program Website: <http://dec.state.ak.us/water/wqsar/wqs/beachprogram.htm>.

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