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Press Release

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Kenai River Beach Sampling Continues to Find Elevated Levels of Bacteria

(KENAI, AK) – Ongoing Kenai River beach sampling is showing continued high levels of fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria in the water. The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation is conducting beach monitoring this summer at two Kenai River beaches to determine if the water is safe for recreation. Beach monitoring started in mid-June and will continue until mid-August. Some of the samples collected on Sunday July 21 and Wednesday July 24, 2013 had high levels of bacteria; several times higher than the state standards for recreational waters.

Contact with water that has high levels of enterococci/fecal coliform bacteria may cause people to have stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye and skin infections. With current levels above water quality standards DEC is reminding beach users to take precautions to reduce the possibility of getting ill from exposure to the contaminated water:

- Don't drink the water.
- Shower or rinse off after being in contact with the water.
- Re-rinse with fresh tap water any seafood that been cleaned with beach water.
- Cook all seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 F before eating to destroy pathogens, even if the seafood has been frozen.

Enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria can come from any warm blooded animal including birds, seals, and humans. The reason for the currently elevated levels is unknown. Potential sources are birds feeding on the beaches and mud flats during low tides, as well as a large bird rookery located upriver from the beach. Other sources include dogs, and humans.

The beach sampling program is being funded and implemented by DEC with cooperation of the City of Kenai. It is part of a nationwide effort to decrease the incidence of water-borne illness at public beaches under the federal BEACH Act.

For more information about the Alaska beach monitoring program visit the Alaska BEACH Grant Program Website:

<http://www.dec.state.ak.us/water/wqsar/wqs/beachprogram.htm>.

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