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Press Release

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DEC Finds Elevated Bacteria Levels on Coastal Areas in Ketchikan

Enterococci bacteria may indicate a health risk

(KETCHIKAN, AK) — The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently collected water quality samples along coastal beach areas in Ketchikan, Alaska. These samples indicated elevated levels of enterococci bacteria in the marine water at the following locations:

- Beacon Hill (off of North Point Higgins Road)
- Knudson Cove Marina (north of Ketchikan)
- Refuge Cove Beach (south end of Refuge Cove Beach State Park)
- Rotary Beach also known as Bugges Beach (located approximately 3.4 miles south of town on South Tongass Highway)
- Seaport Beach (near Saxman)
- South Point Higgins Beach (12 miles north of Ketchikan)
- Sunset Beach (south end of Mud Bay)

Contact with water impacted by enterococci bacteria may cause stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye, and skin infections. DEC recommends beach users take normal precautions to 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.

Water quality samples collected on August 8 and 9 contained levels well above Alaska's enterococci bacteria limit. Until sample results meet water quality standards and DEC lifts this advisory, people should take precautionary measures when recreating. DEC plans to continue monitoring and sampling until results are within the criteria. The next sampling will occur next week.

The beach sampling program is being funded and 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.

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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