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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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DEC Finds Elevated Levels of Bacteria at Sandy Beach in Petersburg

Fecal coliform bacteria may pose a health risk

(PETERSBURG, AK) – The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) recently collected water quality samples at Sandy Beach in Petersburg, Alaska. These samples indicate elevated levels of fecal coliform bacteria in the marine water near the beach.

Contact with water impacted by fecal coliform bacteria may cause stomach aches, diarrhea, or ear, eye, and skin infections. DEC recommends that beach users take normal precautions to avoid exposure, such as avoiding swimming in the water, washing after contact with the water, and rinsing fish harvested from the area with clean water. As always, people should cook seafood to a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit to destroy pathogens.

Sandy Beach is located approximately 1½ miles east of town, ½ mile east of the airport, on Sandy Beach Road. Water quality samples were collected on September 11 and 16, 2015. The water sample results for September 11 was 260 fecal coliform bacteria count per 100 milliliters (FC/100 ml), and the September 16 result was 410 FC/100 ml. Alaska's fecal coliform standard for recreation is 200 FC/100 ml for a single sample or for no more than 10% of samples collected in a month.

Water samples have been collected 12 times at Sandy Beach since July 9, 2015. Previous bacteria counts have ranged from 0 to 58 FC/100 ml. Enterococci bacteria levels have also been tested and remain below water quality criteria levels of 276 enterococci/100 ml with a maximum measured level of 85 enterococci/100 ml.

DEC continues to monitor water quality. A sample was collected this morning, Friday, September 18, and additional sampling results are expected Saturday, September 19.

Fecal coliform bacteria can come from any warm blooded animal, including birds, seals, and humans. The reason for the currently elevated levels of bacteria is unknown. Potential sources are birds, marine mammals, humans, and dogs.

DEC has collected samples this summer to evaluate bacteria levels at Sandy Beach and will continue sampling in spring/summer of 2016. The beach sampling program is being funded and implemented by DEC. It is part of a nationwide effort under the federal BEACH Act to decrease the incidence of water-borne illness at public beaches.

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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