

State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation



Larry Hartig
Commissioner

Candice Barber 907.465.5009
Public Information Officer candice.barber@alaska.gov

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CONTACT: Nancy Sonafrank, Division of Water, (907) 451-2726, nancy.sonafrank@alaska.gov

DEC Reports No Elevated Bacteria Levels at Coastal Areas in Ketchikan

(KETCHIKAN, AK) — The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) has confirmed enterococci bacteria levels have tested below water quality criteria for all nine coastal areas in Ketchikan.

From July 18 to September 13, DEC collected water quality samples at nine coastal areas in Ketchikan 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. The latest tests on September 13 show all locations meeting the water quality standards for enterococci. Therefore, DEC is withdrawing the recreational beach advisory issued in August. DEC will suspend bacteria monitoring in the Ketchikan coastal areas until the 2018 summer recreation season.

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 and municipal treatment systems, sewer line leakage, and/or boats in harbor areas. Additional DNA marker testing was conducted and is currently being evaluated to help determine whether the bacteria source(s) are human, animals, or birds. The DNA testing for all nine locations indicated bacteria were present from human sources, although animal and bird sources were also identified at some locations. A project report is anticipated in November and will be posted on the DEC Alaska BEACH webpage at <http://dec.alaska.gov/water/wqsar/wqs/beachprogram.htm>.

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. Since 2002, the Alaska's BEACH Program has been monitoring recreational beaches throughout the state, including other communities in southeast Alaska: Douglas Island, Haines, Juneau, Petersburg, and Wrangell. Sample results have not shown persistent elevated levels of bacteria in these communities.

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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