



Beach Closures 2012

Thursday, October 27, 2011

9:00 to 11:00 a.m.

Save The Bay



Presentation by Lauren Russo, RIDOH

The Department of Health's Beach Monitoring program monitored 71 licensed salt water beaches during the 2011 beach season (May 27 – Sept 5). Water quality shows improvement. The number of closure days decreased from 70 (2010) to 68 (2011), closure events decreased from 45 (2010) to 34 (2011) and the number of beaches with closures decreased from 19 to 16. During this same time frame, the closure events including freshwater beaches, which are not included in the RIDOH program, increased from 150 (2010) to 222 (2011). Lauren noted that saltwater beaches are sometimes closed for safety (rip tides) and nuisance (excess algae on the beach) and these closures are not included in the DOH data. Rhode Island licensed saltwater beaches were also closed prior to Hurricane Irene in August as a precaution against extremely high rainfall and subsequent runoff to beaches, and these closure events are included in the 2011 data.

Significant investments have been made to improve water quality at key RI beaches. For example, at Newport's Easton's Beach, a new \$6 million UV plant went on line this year. The town also has invested in seaweed harvesting and additional monitoring. DOH monitoring showed significant improvements in bacteria counts when comparing the influent to the UV plant (100 % samples exceeded EPA standards) to the treated effluent (8 % exceeded EPA standards). However, bacterial counts increased at the outlet near the beach (50 % exceeded standards). This is based on an incomplete data set.

Other DOH 2011 beach initiatives include:

1. Pet Waste Study. DOH visited 44 saltwater beaches and conducted interviews with the public to explore understanding of and attitudes towards pet waste as a source of beach pollution.
2. Unlicensed beach sampling. 132 unlicensed beaches were identified when the Beach Program began in 1998. During 2011, 75 areas were sampled.
3. 2011 Recreational Water Use Survey. DOH has identified 18 people who recreate in the water year round and who have agreed to participate in user and health surveys. So far, they received 76 surveys in 2011. None of the users reported illness. This investigation will continue until the end of 2011.
4. Urban beach sampling. During 2011, DOH partnered with Save The Bay (STB) to expand the urban beach program from 3 to 5 beaches (Sabin's Point, Rose Larisa, Gaspee Point, Bold Point, Fields Point, the latter two in partnership with STB). The number of samples increased from 165 (2010) to 249 (2011). The number of times that EPA standards were exceeded also increased.

Upcoming initiatives

1. In 2012, DOH will conduct microbial source tracking at 10 high priority beaches. They will sample 23 stations, looking at 10 events (5 dry and 5 wet), then examining the bacterial DNA for species specific information.
2. GIS interactive map viewer. DOH has been developing the map viewer. Phase 1 is expected to come on line in spring 2012 and will allow users to browse current water quality data with a map interface. Historic water quality data will be added in Phase 2 in 2013.

Group discussion – What should Watershed Counts highlight in the 2012 report?

- We should look at the influence of Hurricane Irene on beach closure numbers.
- Highlight the improvements in salt water beaches due to monitoring and strategic investments in water quality improvements in contrast to the lack of freshwater beach monitoring. Many freshwater beaches are associated with children's camps. Investments in water quality improvements could make significant improvement in these important community resources.
- Does the public perceive that more beaches are closed? Perhaps. This could be due to
 - heightened awareness and publicity of beach closures
 - closure of freshwater beaches
 - closure of saltwater beaches because of riptides, jellyfish or other conditions deemed unsafe by the beach manager. These are not reported to DOH and not included in their closure statistics
- Note that beaches are closed for safety not just water quality. We should be sure that the WC indicator specifies "Beach closure events due to water quality" with an asterisk explaining other possible reasons for closure.
- We could include a success story – Saunderstown Yacht Club was suggested as a possible case where investments in water quality protection resulted in eliminating beach closures due to water quality.
- We might want to highlight beaches in urban areas (Lincoln Woods) as this is where the state's political power is centered. Gorton Pond (Warwick) was closed a lot, Governor Notte Park Beach (North Providence) was closed from June 30 – Sept 5 because the City did not re-sample due to lack of funds.
- Include the Upper Bay data and map that we used in 2010, updated with 2011 data. Also include areas where community boating occurs.
- Should we make a link to shellfish openings? Or highlight recreational uses of the upper bay?
- The group noted that the Providence CSOs have removed significant pollutant loads, particularly N, in addition to bacteria. Other major WWTPs in the state are also in the midst of major upgrades – complete in 2014. Get in touch with Pam to get CSO numbers for the report.
- Should we include information on guidelines about when it is most likely to be safe to swim after rainfall events. DOH recommends waiting 48 hours after 1 inch of rain for the upper bay.

- Encourage reporting of illness related to swimming. Forms are on the Clean Ocean Access, Rhode Island Chapter of the Surfrider Foundation and the DOH beach program web site: <http://www.ribeaches.org/complaints.cfm>

Recommendations for Rolling out Watershed Counts

- Participate in other Earth Day events.
- Expand beyond the ECRI Lobby Day – having an event at the State House brings press, but in 2010 only a couple of legislators attended. We also need to be careful about mixing WC with an advocacy agenda.
- Science Saturday at GSO. June. Last year attracted about 4,000 visitors.
- Farmers Markets. (EcoRI is attending. We could partner with them)
- Disseminate posters to more partners (STB Exploration Center, Norman Bird Scty, DOA, others?)
- Governors Bay Day
- URI East Farm open house
- Washington County Fair
- Think about adding video to WC web site – short clips of a couple of minutes that explains why each indicator is relevant/important, link to management. STB links to video in press releases and finds that it attracts press and that the press link to the videos, getting additional exposure.
- Train students to take it on the road

Many thanks to all the participants!

Jim Boyd, Coastal Resources Management Council

Frank Carini, EcoRI News

Marci Cole Ekberg, Save The Bay

Wenley Ferguson, Save The Bay

Allison Hamel, RI Dept. of Transportation

Q Kellogg, URI Coastal Institute

Meg Kerr, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program

Lesley Lambert, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program

David Murray, Brown University

Amie Parris, RI Dept. of Health Beach Program

Jenny Pereira, RI Foundation

Pamela Reitsma, Narragansett Bay Commission

Lauren Russo, RI Dept. of Health Beach Program

Judith Swift, URI Coastal Institute

Chip Young, URI Coastal Institute