

Coast Guards



Like so many storm water industry issues, beach water quality affects us as both professionals and members of the general public. Beach closings usually are the result of too-high bacteria counts, and heavy rainfall, sewer overflows and inadequate infrastructure are common culprits. With tens of millions of Americans gearing up for beach visits, I have to ask: “Are we ready?”

In January, for the eleventh year, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provided grants to states, territories and tribes in support of beach and beachgoer protection. Grant dollars—

totaling \$10 million this time around—will be used to monitor beach water quality and notify the public when conditions are unsafe, as presented in the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act of 2000.

Despite strengthened funding and legislation, news about closures consistently has populated local media across the country. In 2010, ocean, bay and Great Lakes beach closings came in at their sixth-highest level in 20 years, according to the National Resources Defense Council.

Are beaches closing more frequently due to unattended-to storm water needs, or because monitoring has become more widespread and routine? While a huge storm water improvement potential remains, I tend to believe the latter (along with year-to-year rainfall variations) plays a more significant role in the most recent closure rates. States and territories today are monitoring more than twice the number of beaches they had in 2003. Armed with valuable information—and more of it—the next step in guarding our coasts will be putting findings into action to protect the health of beaches and those who enjoy them.

To this end, as part of a recent legal settlement, look for the EPA to begin updating its beach water quality standards, conducting new health and swimmer research, addressing more waterborne illnesses and developing a same-day-results water testing method.

To our coastal-based readers: What is the beach water quality situation in your area? In recent seasons, have you seen increasing, decreasing or consistent numbers of closing dates? And what local- and state-level efforts are being made to pinpoint, control and monitor pollution sources? Please share your experiences with the *Storm Water Solutions* editorial staff and your peers.

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