

# Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy: Beach Sanitary Survey

On December 12, 2005, EPA Administrator Steve Johnson announced at the *GLRC Summit II Event in Chicago, IL*, that the Bush Administration had identified eight near-term prioritized actions in the Great Lakes Strategy. One of these actions directed EPA to develop a standardized approach to help identify sources of contamination at beaches.

To meet our commitments, EPA constructed a workgroup comprised of state and county Great Lakes beach managers to develop a Beach Sanitary Survey. EPA has initiated a three-year, three-step effort to design and implement beach sanitary surveys in Great Lakes recreational waters. This is how the effort will unfold:

- Develop the final sanitary survey form and beta-test the sanitary surveys at a Great Lakes beach;
- Develop grant criteria and award grants, if funding is available, to states to pilot and/or implement sanitary surveys in their beach programs; and
- Evaluate pilot studies, publish a final beach sanitary survey, and provide technical assistance for implementing beach sanitary surveys.

## **What is a beach sanitary survey?**

Beach sanitary surveys help state and local water program managers ascertain local beach contamination and evaluate conditions that pose risks to human health at recreational beaches. Sanitary surveys are typically associated with drinking water and shellfish programs. They can also be used at beaches to:

- Identify persistent problems where beaches do not meet water quality standards;
- Identify sources of pollution;
- Assess the magnitude of pollution; and
- Suggest appropriate actions to control pollution and identify priority locations for sampling.

## **What is the purpose of a beach sanitary survey?**

A beach sanitary survey helps beach managers identify sources of bacterial contamination at their beaches. States monitor their beaches for harmful microorganisms such as E.coli, which serve as indicators of fecal contamination and which are often associated with untreated or partially treated sewage. Beaches can also be contaminated by sewage from combined sewer overflows, sanitary sewer overflows, and malfunctioning sewage treatment plants and septic tanks. Beaches can also be impacted by untreated storm water runoff from cities and rural areas, which sometimes contains wildlife feces and pet waste. Despite monitoring efforts, about half of all beach advisories are caused by unknown sources.

## **What is the benefit of a beach sanitary survey?**

A beach sanitary survey allows beach managers to identify unknown sources of beach contamination and inform the public about any potential pollution impacting a beach. This helps the public make more informed decisions before swimming and reduce their risk of swimming-related illness.

With a beach sanitary survey, beach managers will be able to apply a risk- and watershed-based approach to their existing beach monitoring and notification programs. The sanitary surveys will also enable beach managers to more efficiently use their resources, apply survey results to preemptive models, and remediate sources of bacterial pollution at beaches. (Beach models are pre-emptive, as they are trying to prevent the worst case scenario and aid in problem solving.) The beach sanitary survey will help beach managers identify and remediate (address or fix) the problem.

## Proposed Actions and Activities

**NOTE** - All Draft documents are posted to assist eligible Beach Sanitary Survey Grant applicants in constructing their grant applications. Please do not cite or quote.

The datafields in the Draft On-Site Survey and the content of the Draft Annual Survey are not expected to significantly change in their final version. The Draft Guidance will be updated at the end of the project to reflect the comments of the pilot program.

- ✓ Draft On-Site Survey – A quick survey form to be performed on-site at the time of water sample collection – <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/2006guid/2006-bch01.pdf>
- ✓ Draft Annual Survey – A comprehensive survey form to be performed annually for a beach – <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/2006guid/2006-bch02.pdf>
- ✓ Draft Guidance – Guidance to assist beach managers in developing and implementing beach sanitary surveys at their beaches – <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/2006guid/2006-bch03.pdf>
- ✓ National Beach Conference (exit EPA) [http://www.tetrattech-ffx.com/beach\\_conf2006/](http://www.tetrattech-ffx.com/beach_conf2006/) Meeting of state beach program managers and scientists to exchange information and learn from each other's successes – October 2006
- ✓ Grants – <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/fund/2006guid/2006guid.pdf> Announcement of Grants to assist beach managers with developing and implementing beach sanitary surveys at their beaches
- ✓ eTools – Electronic tools to assist beach managers with compiling, storing, and sharing beach sanitary survey data – March 2007
- ✓ Final Guidance - Guidance to assist beach managers in developing and implementing beach sanitary surveys at their beaches – March 2008

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## Related References

BEACH Act <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/act.html>

National Beach Guidance for Grants and Performance Criteria  
<http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/grants/guidance/index.html>