



GREAT LAKES AND ST. LAWRENCE CITIES INITIATIVE
RESPONSE TO NRDC'S *TESTING THE WATERS* ANNUAL REPORT – JULY 29, 2009

The National Resource Defense Council's annual *Testing the Waters* report continues to help keep the spotlight on the important issue of clean beaches and safe recreational water. While *Testing the Waters* focuses primarily on tracking beach closings and advisories, it is important to take note of progress and action being taken by local government on beach management within the Great Lakes region.

"Cities around the Great Lakes understand best the importance of clean, safe and swimmable beaches." said Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative Executive Director David Ullrich. "Beaches are not only important to the economic health of the region but are also the primary access points to natural habitat and affordable recreation for many in urban settings. When a beach is closed, we all lose out."

Mayors of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative have long advocated for better, more rapid test methods, an appropriate indicator organism, and improvements to the recreational water quality standard. We fully expect US EPA to deliver on these by the 2012 deadline. In the meantime, many cities like Racine, WI, Chicago, IL, Milwaukee, WI and Ajax, ON are using tools like the EPA standardized sanitary survey to identify sources of contamination at their beaches and remediate them. Racine's North Beach, for instance, went from a 66% closure rate in the year 2000 to less than 5% in the last four beach seasons as a result of beach management measures such as sand grooming and constructed wetlands.

Through the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Clean Beaches Initiative, the Great Lakes Beach Association, the International Joint Commission's Water Quality Board, and the efforts of communities around the Great Lakes, action is being taken to improve our beaches. For example, local governments in the United States and Canada invest more than \$15 billion annually in Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River protection and restoration activities, \$235 million of which is spent on ecosystem protection and restoration efforts.

We are hopeful there will be continued progress with help from proposed Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding for sanitary surveys, predictive modeling, and nearshore health, and with the passage of the Clean Coastal Environment and Public Health Act of 2009 which contemplates increased funding and allows for flexibility in the use of BEACH Act grants to include sanitary surveys, rapid test methods, and remediation. Furthermore, federal support through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund is critical to keep our aging water and wastewater infrastructure maintained and operating properly, which will reduce beach closures.

Cities around the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River look forward to continuing to work with states, provinces, the U.S. and Canadian federal governments, stakeholders and citizens to ensure the beaches of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence remain clean, safe, swimmable, and open for all to enjoy.

For more information, please contact Melissa Soline at 312-201-4517 or melissa.soline@gslcities.org.

177 North State Street, Suite 500, Chicago, Illinois 60601 ~ (312) 201-4516 phone ~ (312) 553-4355 fax
www.gslcities.org

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