

TORONTO



Toronto is a great city on a Great Lake. Beaches are a key feature of Toronto's waterfront parks which contribute significantly to the quality of life in the city. In turn, swimmable beaches are often used as an indicator of Toronto's environmental performance and quality of life. While the state of the City's beaches has improved markedly over the past five years – a fact recognized internationally by the awarding of seven Blue Flags – a comprehensive approach to waterfront revitalization requires additional beach improvements. The Toronto Beaches Plan identifies actions to further improve Toronto's 11 swimming beaches.

A quality swimming beach, however, depends on much more than just clean beach water. Toronto was the first community in Canada to partner with Environmental Defence to implement the international eco certification Blue Flag program on seven of its beaches. A Blue Flag – the international eco-label for quality beaches – is awarded only if an individual beach meets 27 criteria relating to water quality, environmental management, safety and services, and environmental education. These criteria include having the beach open for swimming for at least 80% of the season, collecting litter and recyclables, having lifeguards present, providing access for people with disabilities, and providing information about beach ecosystems. The Blue Flag is an international program, and as of 2008, over 3200 beaches in 37 countries waved the Blue Flag. It is a great way to promote beaches in Toronto. Flying the Blue Flag demonstrates that the city is working hard to create an enjoyable experience at the beach. Visit [Toronto's Blue Flag beaches](#).(broken link)

Much of the work over the past three decades has focused on improving water quality, beach facilities and monitoring water quality. Toronto has worked hard to improve water quality testing. Since 2002 Toronto Public Health monitors the water seven days a week from June until the end of August. The water is tested for E. coli bacteria, and in order for the water to be considered swimmable, E. coli levels must be less than 100 E. coli per 100ml of water.

Toronto has also a number of innovative projects to better understand beach water quality. Since 2004, along with Environment Canada, the city has used Microbial Source Tracking studies, which allow for a comprehensive look at the quality of water surrounding the beaches, and to begin to pin point the sources

of bacteria. Moving forward, Toronto is also collaborating with the Ontario Ministry of Environment to implement Predictive Models for water quality, which may improve the ability to predict times of high bacteria levels.

Through its Wet Weather Master Flow plan, the City of Toronto installed tanks to intercept and treat combined sewer and storm water overflows in the Eastern Beaches in the 1990s and the Western beaches in 2002. Combined sewer overflows and storm water runoff remain the biggest concerns for maintaining acceptable water quality. The Humber River flows into Lake Ontario and is a major factor affecting water quality for the western beaches, especially Sunnyside Beach. Other past accomplishments include:

- A dune and wetland system was created at Bluffer's Park Beach to intercept and divert the flow of intermittent streams, which has dramatically improved beach water quality.
- An environmental assessment to control erosion at Gibraltar Point has been completed and detailed design of offshore protection and a sand management plan has begun.
- A new beach maintenance program has been implemented, resulting in more frequent litter picking, washroom cleaning, beach grooming and collection of waste and recyclables.
- To reduce E.coli loading from bird feces, a "Don't Feed the Birds" public education campaign has been mounted in all City waterfront parks. The Canada geese management program has been enhanced, and border collies are used by the City to herd geese and gulls off swimming beaches.
- Beach wheelchairs are available for free short-term loan at Woodbine Beach to enable park visitors with disabilities to reach the water's edge.
- A new curtain was installed at Sunnyside beach as a pilot project, designed to contain beach water which is treated using UV.

For more info on Toronto beaches, click [here](#). (broken link)

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All pictures courtesy of City of Toronto website

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