

NORTH SANTA MONICA BAY

Bacteria Source Investigation



The North Santa Monica Bay Bacteria Source Investigation is a study into the sources and potential health risks associated with elevated bacteria levels at Escondido Beach and Ramirez Cove.

Who is conducting the study?

The office of County of Los Angeles Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP), Heal the Bay, the City of Malibu, and the County of Los Angeles departments of Public Works and Public Health.

When will the study begin?

The study will begin March 28, 2007, and end in the fall of 2008.

Where does the bacteria come from?

High bacteria levels can stem from any combination of sources, including pets, horses, septic systems, wildlife, and shorebirds. The study is being conducted to determine the bacteria source(s) and develop ways to prevent bacteria from reaching our local beaches.

What will happen during the study?

The study will be conducted in several phases. During the first 10-week period, researchers will collect water samples from 27 beach, creek, and storm drain locations in the North Santa Monica Bay. These water samples will be sent to a laboratory for testing. In later phases, researchers will determine whether bacteria found are from anthropogenic (human-related) sources or from native wildlife.

The presence of common household by-products, like optical brighteners (added to almost all laundry soaps and detergents) and caffeine, would be consistent with a human impact on water quality.

By Phase III, bacteria "hot spots" (locations with high bacteria readings) will be recognized and additional upstream and downstream testing may be needed to track the source.

A creek on my neighbor's property was selected for testing, but mine was not.

Why is that?

Water sampling locations were selected because of their strategic location within the watershed and because of their ability to yield more useful information. Approximately half the water sampling locations are on properties that are open to the public. The rest of the samples will be obtained from privately-owned properties with creeks that flow downstream into Escondido Beach and Ramirez Cove. In each of these cases, the County has been granted access to conduct water sampling.

What are the health risks of coming into contact with beach water with high bacteria levels?

When it rains, storm drains, creeks, and rivers carry stormwater run-off from urban and wilderness areas to the ocean. This run-off and the area where run-off enters the ocean may contain high levels of bacteria. These locations should be avoided until at least 72 hours after rainfall, as elevated bacteria levels in ocean water can cause some individuals to become ill.