

# East Boston Times-Free Press

John Lynds | August 5, 2015

## Heavy Rains Take Toll on Water Quality at Constitution Beach

East Boston's only public beach has slipped a little on water quality from Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's mid-summer beach report released this week.

Last year at this point in the summer, Constitution Beach scored a 96 percent but has slipped to an 83 percent this year.

According to Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Director of Strategy, Communications and Programs Bruce Berman, Constitution Beach is still on the top 10 of the cleanest beaches from Nahant to Nantasket but frequent rain back in June and during some weeks in July forced beach closures due to high bacteria levels.

"There are two ways to fix an urban beach problem," said Berman. "One way is to sever every pipe that goes into the beach and that's what we did in South Boston but it is very expensive. However, as a result South Boston is cleanest urban beaches in country even when it rains."

The other way to ensure cleaner water is for residents to look at their water and sewer hook ups and make sure they are not 100 year old hook ups that lead out into the storm water drains.

"We had a restaurant several years ago in East Boston that had several hundred patrons a day and found that their water and sewer hook up pumped directly out into the beach. This was not done on purpose but there are hundreds if not thousands of outdated hook ups that need to be addressed. Because during heavy rainfall these hook ups are just pumping household waste into the water."

Berman explained that what happened this year wasn't unusual but just more frequent.

"We haven't had any more rain total than last summer but if you look at the report as a whole last summer if it rained an inch one or two days you had a beach closure," said Berman. "This year we've had little spouts of more frequent rain which is closing the beach more often."

In the end, Berman says that in dry weather, Constitution Beach is a very, very clean beach.

"It is still one of our top beaches," said Berman. "Over the past 20 years we've seen a dramatic turnaround and we've seen an improvement trend that is making the beach a solid A beach."

The beach now has a five year average score of over 95 percent.

"You have to remember where we were 25 years ago," explained Berman. "Deer Island treatment facility was in disarray, broken outflow just off the beach were pumping 200 million gallons of raw sewage back into the harbor after heavy storms."

In recent years, under the leadership of Senator Anthony Petrucci, Berman said crews worked aggressively find and fix broken pipes and illegal hookups that were shutting the beach down one out of every five days a few years back.

"We had old combined outfall hook ups that would mix storm water and sewage together after a big storm and pump it out into the harbor," said Berman. "But seven or eight years ago those were separated so all the sewage gets treated at Deer Island. But the efforts to find the remaining pipes and illegal hookups that were still causing problems has led to the good numbers we are seeing today."

The report card is based on an in-depth analysis of thousands of samples taken by the DCR and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) in 2013. The samples were collected at 34 testing sites on public beaches in Winthrop, Nahant, Lynn, Swampscott, Revere, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull.

The report card is based on methodology developed by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Beaches Science Advisory Committee (BSAC), Co-Chaired by Dr. Judy Pederson of MIT's Sea Grant Program and Dr. Jim Shine of the Harvard School of Public Health. We would like to thank them and Dr. Andrea Rex and Kelly Coughlin of the MWRA, DCR's Gary Briere, and SH/SB's Staff Assistant for water quality Jacqueline Sussman for their help with this report.