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2023 Water Quality Report Card Released for Metropolitan Beaches

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Save the Harbor/Save the Bay released its annual Metropolitan Beaches Water Quality Report Card this week just in time for this year's Fourth of July celebrations. This year's report card covers the Metropolitan Region's public beaches in Lynn, Nahant, Revere, Winthrop, East Boston, South Boston, Dorchester, Quincy and Hull owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and managed by the Department of Conservation & Recreation. It is based on data from the 2022 beach season. In 2022, overall water quality safety rating for Boston Harbor region beaches was 93-percent, up from the previous year's score of 86-percent, largely because it was a particularly dry year, with less than half the rainfall of 2021. They have summarized the results in the table visible on page 2.

Rainfall has a significant impact on the water quality on many beaches. In 2022, the total rainfall was much less than in 2021 (23.95 inches compared to 50.38 inches), resulting in an improvement in the all-beach average safety score.

These seasonal changes are the reason why Save the Harbor/Save the Bay prefers to reference the multi-year average to assess water quality at a beach, instead of single year safety ratings.

The beaches of South Boston continue to be among the cleanest urban beaches in the country, with Carson Beach, Pleasure Bay and City Point Beach each receiving perfect scores of 100-percent in 2022. Eleven area beaches earned scores of over 90-percent this year, while just one beach, King's Beach in Lynn and Swampscott, scored below 80-percent in 2022.

"Most of the region's beaches scored quite well in 2022" said Save the Harbor/Save the Bay's Executive Director Chris Mancini, who noted that King's Beach in Lynn and Swampscott and Tenean Beach in Dorchester continue to lag behind in the six year average. "We are pleased to see improvement at Tenean Beach, which scored 89-percent in 2022, and are hopeful that Lynn and Swampscott ongoing efforts to address persistent pollution at Stacey Brook will improve water quality at King's Beach" said Mancini.

Though most area beaches received great grades in 2022, the flags flown on ocean beaches continue to earn failing grades. For example, 100-percent of the red flags DCR flew on Constitution Beach in East Boston were wrong in 2022, misleading the public about when it was safe to swim and when it was not.

Currently, DCR's beach managers are instructed to fly a red flag to inform beach goers when water sampling test results demonstrate elevated bacteria levels. While the tests themselves are extremely accurate, it takes 24 hours for them to be completed and posted. As a result, they are always at least one day late, and do not reflect current conditions on the beach.

"We believe that there are better ways to provide timely and accurate information about beach water quality to those who need it most," said Mancini, citing the Metropolitan Beaches Commissions recent report "Breaking Barriers", the City of Boston's web-based CSO Health Alerts and DCR's increasing use of QR codes on beach signage as examples. "We look forward to working with the Healey-Driscoll Administration, the Metropolitan Beaches Commission, the Massachusetts Water

Resources Authority, The Department of Conservation & Recreation, state and local officials and other stakeholders to Save the Harbor commended the Department of Public Health for improvements to its beach water quality monitoring website at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/current-public-beach-postings>, which now provides current beach closure notifications in over 100 languages.

"With support from both US EPA and the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health has been able to modernize our public health data systems for reporting the water quality at the more than 550 marine and over 500 freshwater beaches across the state" said Public Health Commissioner Dr. Robbie Goldstein. "Each summer, DPH is responsible for reporting the results of more than 16,000 water quality samples from over 1,000 locations across the state. Our new data reporting system lets us meet our obligation using the best available technology to support our dedicated network of local, state, and tribal partners who keep beaches in Massachusetts safe for all. As part of our commitment to these partners, and our ongoing commitment to equity, we are proud to invest in a new system that provides timely notifications in multiple languages and accessible formats."

When it is completed in July, the fully redesigned site will allow multilingual access to the most current beach water quality test results and historic water-quality data for every beach in the Commonwealth, providing the public with the information they need to make informed decisions about when and where to swim. "In the meantime," said Mancini, "we urge beach-goers to use common sense and stay out of the water for 24 hours – two tide cycles – after a summer storm."

Save the Harbor/Save the Bay thanks Dr. Judy Pederson, former Chair of their Beaches Science Advisory Committee and Bruce Berman, former Director of Strategy & Communications at Save the Harbor/Save the Bay for their guidance in developing the methodology used in this report. They also thank Senate President Karen Spilka and House Speaker Ron Mariano, Metropolitan Beaches Commission Co-Chairs Senator Brendan Crighton of Lynn and Rep. Adrian Madaro of East Boston, and each of the legislative and community members of the Commission for their commitment to clean water and the region's public beaches from Nahant to Nantasket.

They also thank the Healey/Driscoll Administration, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, The Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Richard M. Saltonstall Charitable Foundation, The Rose Family Foundation, Kelly Coughlin of Stony Brook Partners, Save the Harbor's Environmental Policy Assistant Caroline Adamson, and Save the Harbor's Environmental Policy Assistant Aliya Zwyer for their help as well.

To learn more about Save the Harbor/Save the Bay and the great work they do to restore, protect and share Boston Harbor, the waterfront, islands and the region's public beaches with all Bostonians and the region's residents visit their website at www.savetheharbor.org and follow @savetheharbor on social media.