

Colin A. Young | July 14, 2021

Environmental nonprofits alarmed about water quality at King's Beach



A surfer on King's Beach in September of 2020. *WICKED LOCAL STAFF PHOTO / DAVID SOKOL*

Though two environmental non-profits have released differing reports on water quality at Boston-area beaches in recent weeks, both agree that sewage discharges continue to be significant contributors to unsafe swimming conditions.

Environment Massachusetts on July 13 released its annual report highlighting local beaches where water samples tested for concentrations of fecal bacteria greater than the Environmental Protection Agency's highest warning level. That threshold is associated with an illness rate of 32 per 1,000 swimmers.

Of the 556 locations examined (some beaches have more than one sampling location) in

Massachusetts, the report concluded that 264 tested beaches were potentially unsafe for swimming on at least one day in 2020 and that 29 beaches were potentially unsafe on at least 25 percent of the days they were tested.

Save The Harbor/Save The Bay, which released its own report card of water quality at Boston-area beaches on July 4, took exception to Environment Massachusetts' methods and said that one day of water samples exceeding the EPA limit is not a good barometer of safety for swimming.

"Though it makes a good headline, it is hyperbolic to suggest that swimming on 264 out of 457 beaches in Massachusetts poses a threat to human health

because they may have failed one water quality test in 2020 after a summer rain," said Executive Director Chris Mancini. "It is misleading to release a report which includes beaches like M Street Beach in South Boston, which has failed just one test in five years along side beaches like King's Beach in Lynn and Swampscott or Tenean Beach in Dorchester that were unsafe for swimming more than one out of every five days in 2020."

Mancini said the Environment Massachusetts report is "overly simplistic" and fails to make important distinctions "that should drive critical investments in clean water where we need it the most" and "obscures the fact that this is an environmental justice

issue, as our most diverse communities of color and need often have the poorest water quality on their beaches." A similar disagreement over the validity of beach water quality reports erupted in 2019.