

Beacon Hill Times

We All Benefit from Clean Beaches and Water

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By Beacon Hill Times Staff

The report released by the environmental advocacy group Save the Harbor/Save the Bay (SH/SB) rating the water quality of the beaches in the Metropolitan Boston area and the EPA rating of an A- water quality for the Charles River once again shows that Massachusetts is a nationwide leader in providing a safe and outstanding recreational resource for its residents.

For those of us who grew up in the Greater Boston area in the period from the 1960s through the 1990s, these reports never cease to amaze since Boston Harbor and many of the rivers like the Charles River had served as the dumping ground for industrial and sewage waste for more than a century and by the 1980s, was on the verge of becoming a “dead zone” both for aquatic life and human activity. As a matter of fact if one was taking a sailing course at Community Boating in the 1970’s and fell into the water, then a tetanus shot was required.

However, in 1986 the state created the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (the MWRA), which undertook the enormous responsibility of cleaning up Boston Harbor and surrounding environs, as well as taking steps to ensure the quality of our drinking water.

For most of us in this area, the MWRA is the government body we love to hate because of our high water and sewer bills. But it is axiomatic that you don’t get something for nothing and that it takes money to make money.

The reality is that the MWRA has done a remarkable job in making Boston Harbor and the rivers one of the cleanest urban waterways in the nation and creating a jewel that has more than paid for itself in terms of job creation and spurring economic growth in this area.

The incredible waterfront development in South Boston and East Boston would not have been possible if Boston Harbor were still the smelly and foul waterway of a generation ago.

There are so many factors that affect water quality, both directly and indirectly, that it can be difficult — and extremely costly — to remedy all of them. We would note for example, that even beaches further down along the South Shore in Cohasset and Scituate (which are not included in the SH/SB report card) are closed after heavy rain events. On the other hand, beaches in South Boston had a 100 percent rating.

One huge effect on water quality comes from dog poop. Tenean Beach in Dorchester ranked dead last in the survey in 15th place with a rating of 81%. But that beach also hosts a dog park and SH/SB reported that it helped remove more than a ton of dog waste this spring, which hopefully will improve the water quality for the summer season ahead.

We wish to thank SH/SB and the EPA for issuing the reports. In addition, it is up to each of us to be environmentally-responsible, especially if we own a dog.