



Daytona Beach, FL

## **Bacteria-related beach closings down**

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Florida's bacteria-related beach closings and swimming advisories dropped 16 percent last year, a new report says.

The report, part of a nationwide beach health survey released Thursday by the Natural Resources Defense Council in New York, also singled out five Florida beaches that had persistent bacterial pollution in 2004.

None of those beaches was in Volusia or Flagler counties.

Flagler has never had a beach closing or swimming advisory caused by elevated bacteria levels, authorities say. In Volusia, where swimming advisories are common, there were 32 closings in 2004, most of them in three spots: Florida Shores Boulevard in Daytona Beach Shores, and International Speedway Boulevard and Silver Beach Avenue in Daytona Beach.

Elevated bacteria levels can cause gastrointestinal illness in swimmers who ingest contaminated sea water, which is why health departments in Florida's coastal counties sample regularly for hazardous bacteria. The source of the bacteria can be storm runoff (which transports animal waste into sea water), overflowing sewage systems, migratory wildlife and faulty septic tanks.

In Volusia, high bacteria levels are considered a seasonal phenomenon, linked to feces from the migratory shorebirds that arrive in droves each winter. All of last year's advisories were issued between January and March, when birds are abundant and swimmers are scarce.

Linda Young, southeast regional director of the Clean Water Network, said at a Tallahassee news conference Thursday that the statewide drop in closures and advisories was "good news," yet Florida could still do more to curb controllable sources of pollution.

Several states fared poorly in the beaches report, which showed health advisories and closings in Texas jumping tenfold in 2004, in Washington jumping sevenfold, and doubling in New York and Illinois. Nationwide, the warnings increased by 9 percent.

Florida's beaches violated bacterial standards an average of 3 percent of the time, the report's authors found. But some communities had much more frequent violations.

The state's most bacteria-laden beach was Phil Foster Park Beach in Palm Beach County, which flunked 46 percent of its sampling tests. Close behind it were Bayou Chico Beach in Escambia County; South Beach in Monroe County; Alligator Point Beach in Franklin County; and Dekle Beach in Taylor County, all of which flunked roughly a third of the time.

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*-- Tallahassee Bureau Chief Jim Saunders contributed to this report.*

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