

St. Petersburg
Times

LOCAL
EDITION

FRIDAY
July 29, 2005



FLORIDA'S best NEWSPAPER

METRO & STATE

FRIDAY, JULY 29, 2005 ■ THE TIMES

SECTION
B...

Beaches in state faring better

■ Closings and health advisories due to water contamination fall slightly in 2004, a report says.

By **EMILY ANTHES**
Times Staff Writer

Florida beachgoers were less likely to run into unhealthy beach conditions last year than in 2003, according to a report released Thursday.

The number of Florida beach closings and health advisories due to water contamination decreased slightly in 2004, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

There were 3,345 beach closings and health advisory days in Florida last year, a 16 percent drop from 2003. All of the 2004 closings in Florida were a result of water contaminated by hazardous levels of bacteria, the report said.

None of the closures resulted from Red Tide. It is not yet clear how this summer's outbreak of the toxic algal bloom that has plagued the Tampa Bay area will affect the 2005 data. Red Tide has not yet caused any beach closures this year, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute.

The decrease in bacterial contamination is encouraging, but Florida still has serious water safety problems, said Linda Young, the southeast regional director for the Natural Resources Defense Council's Clean Water Network.

"We're always glad when things go down instead of up, but that's statewide for the whole year," she said. "It doesn't tell you much about what's going on at specific places."

And at specific places, the picture remains troubling, she said.

Overall, Florida beaches violated public health standards for bacterial levels 3 percent of the time.

Please see **BEACHES 4B**