

## Beaches from 1B

But 15 Florida beaches, including the Energy and Marine Center in Pasco county, fail to meet public health standards for safe bacteria levels more than 15 percent of the time, according to the report.

The Phil Foster Park Beach in Palm Beach County performed worst in the state, violating stan-

dards 46 percent of the time.

The presence of high levels of bacteria poses a risk to swimmers, especially the young and elderly, and can cause problems including gastroenteritis, dysentery and hepatitis. In most cases, the sources of the bacteria found along Florida beaches last year were not known, the report said.

Both individual and government action is required to improve water cleanliness, Young

said. Individuals should make sure to clean up after their pets and ensure their septic tanks are working, she said, while governments need to update their sewage systems to ensure they are not overwhelmed.

"The sewage system in Florida is woefully inadequate," she said. "We're seeing, more and more in Florida, sort of some foot-dragging on keeping our infrastructure up with the growth that we

love so much."

The latest Red Tide counts show scattered blooms still present in the area. Conditions have improved at the northern Pinellas beaches, where the levels of toxins are only slightly elevated, said Jeremy Lake, spokesman for the Institute.

But the Red Tide at Fort Desoto and beaches along the Sunshine Skyway has worsened considerably, with Fort Desoto beach

showing very high Red Tide Counts, he said.

Strong westerly winds forecast for this weekend could push the Red Tide ashore and change its distribution pattern, Lake said.

Though Florida improved in 2004, there were nearly 20,000 beach closings and health advisories nationally in 2004, the highest number since the council began recording the information 15 years ago.