

URL: http://www.tcpalm.com/tcp/wptv/article/0,2547,TCP_1213_3963047,00.html

Riviera Beach shore ranked as Florida's worst for bacterial contamination

By Neil Santaniello; Sentinel
July 29, 2005

A popular stretch of Riviera Beach shore ranked as Florida's worst for bacterial contamination last year, according to a report released Thursday by an environmental group.

The Natural Resources Defense Council's nationwide survey of beach water quality tallied 3,345 days of beach closings and health advisories in Florida during 2004, a 16 percent drop over the previous year, the group said.

But the annual guide to safe swimming singled out a beach in Phil Foster Park, inside the Intracoastal Waterway beneath the Blue Heron Boulevard bridge, as the stretch of Florida sand most plagued with bacterial pollution in 2004.

The 7-acre park, closed to swimmers in recent months because of hurricane damage and renovation, is county owned and maintained.

While water samples pulled from beaches statewide exceeded public-health standards 3 percent of the time, Phil Foster Park failed 46 percent, the report states. Ninety-one of 200 park water samples checked by state health officials failed safety requirements, said Linda Young, southeast regional director of the Clean Water Network.

"That's shockingly high," Young said, "and in a part of the state where so many people are trying to use the beaches."

Most of Florida's poorer-performing shorelines were on the Gulf of Mexico, mainly in the Florida Keys and Panhandle, according to the report called Testing the Waters.

Palm Beach County checks the water at 14 beaches weekly. Health, park and environmental officials said investigations have been done into the Phil Foster Park bacteria problem but a cause has not been identified.

"It's certainly something we're concerned about, something we're addressing," said Dennis Eshleman, county director of parks and recreation.

Bacterial pollution tainting beach water can come from various sources, including septic tanks, sewer pipes, storm drains, boat discharges and wildlife.

Palm Beach County had 11 days of beach closings or advisories last year, down from 16 in 2002. That number in Broward County fell from 200 in 2003 to nine last year.

Broward's dramatic decrease stemmed from a change in testing locations, officials said.

The Florida Health Department stopped testing sites on the Intracoastal Waterway, where pollution from stormwater runoff and boats can become concentrated, said Steve Dennison, environmental