

MCS GOOD BEACH GUIDE 2010:

More UK beaches have better water quality than last year - but sewer overflow pipes are still putting beach goers at risk, says Marine Conservation Society

The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) says more beaches have excellent water quality this year than in 2009, but the increase still doesn't match the number in 2006 when almost two thirds of British beaches were recommended in its Good Beach Guide (www.goodbeachguide.co.uk).

MCS says 421 (55%) of the UK's 769 bathing beaches have been recommended for excellent water quality this year. The results are a slight improvement on the 388 sites (50%) recommended in 2009, and the number of failures has also dropped this year to 41 from 66 failed sites in last year's guide.

The latest bathing water tests were conducted from May to September 2009. According to climate data from the Met Office, the summers 2007 to 2009 combined were the wettest period since 1914. MCS believes that only half of Britain's beaches are reaching its stringent water quality standards because higher seasonal rainfall is causing a network of combined sewer overflows to discharge raw sewage on to some beaches from an overloaded sewer system, and pollutants like animal waste, fertilisers and refuse are being washed from farm land and city streets into rivers and the sea.

Rachel Wyatt from the Marine Conservation Society, said: "In the last three years there's been a shift in the water quality trend on our beaches. From 2001 there was a steady improvement which peaked in the Good Beach Guide of 2006 when we recommended a record 505 beaches. Since then, water quality has declined due to high volumes of rain carrying storm pollution from the sewer system, farmland and towns into the sea. The regional pattern to this rainfall means that some regions such as North West England and Scotland fared worse in this year's guide whereas others like the Channel Isles did markedly better."

MCS is concerned that the current situation may further deteriorate when new stricter bathing water standards are introduced in 2015. Under this new regime, 83 (14%) of Britain's beaches will fail the new minimum water quality standard if nothing's done to improve them. The list includes notables like Rock in Cornwall, Paignton Sands, Robin Hoods Bay, Bridlington South, Chalkwell bay at Southend, Plymouth Hoe and the main beach at Weston super Mare.

Thomas Bell, MCS Coastal Pollution Officer, said: "Our campaign is focused now on the degree to which combined sewer overflows are to blame for bathing water pollution and what can be

done about it. We're talking about a vast network of sewer overflow pipes which carry raw sewage out of flooded sewer systems and deposit it in rivers and the sea."

"MCS knows of at least 500 UK beaches with one or more of these pipes. There are many places where they don't cause a problem but 45% of tested beaches aren't recommended by MCS because of pollution. That percentage is set to increase because of tougher bathing water standards from 2015, and we think CSOs are partly to blame."

The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) works in partnership with MCS, and the Good Beach Guide carries information about the RNLI's national beach safety programme as well details of beaches patrolled by the RNLI lifeguards and Local Authority lifeguards.

'MCS Recommended' is one of five UK beach awards, but is the only scheme that focuses entirely on water quality standards and the risk of sewage pollution. MCS will only recommend beaches in the Good Beach Guide if they are better than the Guideline European water quality standard and are not affected by inadequately treated continuous sewage discharge.

The 23rd edition of the Good Beach Guide is published in support of the MCS Campaign for Clean Seas & Beaches. It is the only independent, comprehensive guide to bathing water quality in the UK is available online at www.goodbeachguide.co.uk from 00:01 28th May.



The Marine Conservation Society (MCS) is the UK charity dedicated to the protection of our seas, shores and wildlife.

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