



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 5
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

JUL 11 2001

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF

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Dear Beach Conference Participants:

We are pleased to forward the proceedings and working draft maps from the Great Lakes Beach Conference 2001. Thank you for committing your valuable time to participate in one of the first opportunities to collaboratively discuss issues affecting beaches along the Great Lakes.

The concerns and need to improve water quality at our nation's beaches and recreational waters led to the establishment in 1997 of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (US EPA) Beaches Environmental Assessment, Closure and Health (BEACH) Program. The goal of the BEACH Program is to significantly reduce the risk of disease to users of the nation's recreational waters through improvements in water quality programs, risk communication, and scientific advances. The technical and policy direction of this program was developed in consultation with major stakeholders and other interested parties. US EPA is committed to continue this very useful collaboration.

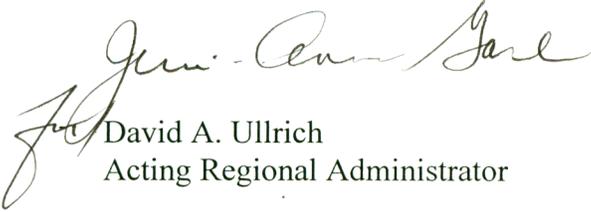
A key aspect of the BEACH Program is to improve public beach information. US EPA has developed a BEACH Watch website to communicate timely recreational water quality information (www.epa.gov/ost/beaches). The website also contains information about individual beaches and protection programs, conference information, and links to regional beach projects. In addition, a national inventory of digitized beach maps is being developed which will be linked with locations of pollution sources and presented in a Geographic Information System combined with the National Beach Health Survey.

Another useful communication tool is the beach guidance document being developed by US EPA to help beach managers establish monitoring and public notification programs. The beach guidance document also outlines the criteria to be followed by recipients of the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act grants. Guidance for the BEACH Act development grants was published in the Federal Register on May 30, 2001. A draft of the beach guidance document will be ready for public comment this summer. A public meeting is planned for Chicago on August 23, 2001 for stakeholders in the Great Lakes. The purpose of the meeting is to provide assistance to the public in submitting comments on the beach guidance document. For more information, contact Holly Wirick at (312) 353-6704.

Several additional follow-up activities to the Great Lakes Beach Conference are proposed, including on-line beach information, through U.S. EPA's Great Lakes National Program Office and the Great Lakes Commission, an interactive list serve, creation of Great Lakes beach maps, development of education and outreach materials, and follow-up workshops. The first workshop, on volunteer water quality monitoring, is planned for March, 2002. The workshop will provide an opportunity to volunteer groups to improve water quality monitoring operations, improve the quality of data collected, and enhance training techniques.

It is our hope that as a result of the conference and follow-up activities you will be better prepared for the challenge with new management tools, enhanced scientific data, and will be more prepared to communicate beach water quality information to the public. Most importantly, we hope you will be part of a network that keeps you tied in to the latest information available for maintaining healthy Great Lakes beaches. For further information, please feel free to contact Judy Beck at (312) 353-3849 or Holly Wirick at (312) 353-6704.

Sincerely yours,



David A. Ullrich
Acting Regional Administrator