



Fund the Florida Healthy Beaches Program

History & Overview:

In 2000, the Florida Legislature created the Florida Healthy Beaches Program to test coastal water quality throughout the state. The program samples for fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria, which are bacterial indicators of poor water quality. Exposure to contaminated water can lead to gastroenteritis, respiratory illness, rashes, eye and ear ailments, and more.

Funding & History:

The Legislature funded the Florida Healthy Beaches Program with a \$525,000 annually, managed by the Florida Department of Health. In 2011, however, state funding was re-prioritized from the beaches program, which now relies exclusively on federal funding through the BEACH Act. For the last four years, the Obama Administration has proposed elimination of all funding for the BEACH Act. Fortunately, Congress has restored funding for this program each year (FY2013-FY2016). If, however, this program were not funded- Florida would not have any funds appropriated to continue testing for bacteria at local beaches.

Additionally, due to a lack of state funds, the program has significantly reduced sampling frequency. The base line program sampling has decreased from weekly to bi-weekly and sampling is suspended between November and March for all counties north of Pinellas and Brevard. The program has also reduced the number of sampling locations monitored from 304 year-round to 254 April-October.

What's at stake:

Florida's beaches and waterways are the lifeblood of our economy. In 2015 there were 139 advisories in Florida. In 2016, through the end of June, we have had 91 advisories.

During Hurricane Sandy, 172 million gallons of waste spilled into Tampa Bay and adjacent waterways. In May 2016, more than 1 million gallons of raw sewage spilled into the Banana River in Brevard County. In June 2016, 800 gallons of raw sewage spilled in Mexico Beach in Bay County. Over the course of just six months in 2015, Miami-Dade spilled over a million gallons of raw sewage. These spills occur with alarming regularity across Florida.

Fund the Florida Healthy Beaches Program to protect human health and our coastal economy.