

**Coastal swimming beach bacteriological water quality monitoring continues in 2002**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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Recreational water quality is more than a vital natural resource, it is a way of life to coastal Alabama citizens and visitors. Beginning in August 1999, the Alabama Department of Environmental Management and the Alabama Department of Public Health cooperatively developed and implemented a bacteriological water quality monitoring and public notification program for Alabama's coastal areas. This effort is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program.

With the continued support of site operators, 11 public access beach sites in Baldwin and Mobile counties are monitored weekly, with some sites being monitored twice weekly. The sites that are monitored in Baldwin County include: Alabama Point, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge, Fairhope Beach, Fort Morgan Beach, Gulf State Park Pavilion, Gulf Shores Public Beach, Little Lagoon Pass and May Day Park.

The sites monitored in Mobile County include: the Alba Club on Dog River, Bay Front Park (Mon Louis Island) and Dauphin Island Pier. Based on EPA's "Criteria for Bathing (Full Body Contact) Recreational Waters," samples are checked for enterococcus bacteria. These indicator bacteria are inhabitants of the intestines of humans and other warm-blooded animals.

As of May 1, 2002, a total of 832 samples had been collected by ADEM and analyzed by ADPH, Mobile Division Laboratory. Some 798 samples or 95.9 percent were below the EPA standard of 104 enterococcus organisms for marine water. Only 34 samples or 4.1 percent exceeded the EPA standard. The bacterial test results are posted on ADEM's Web site at <http://www.adem.state.al.us> under "Monitoring" and "Beach Monitoring" headings.

Bacterial concentrations in recreational waters can increase during and immediately following rainstorms due to overflowing sewage collection and treatment facilities, storm water runoff, and malfunctioning septic systems.

When monitoring results exceed the EPA standard, the affected site is immediately retested. If the results of the second test identify enterococci levels persisting above the EPA standard, a public advisory is issued by the health department through the cooperative efforts of the news media. This advisory states there may be an increased risk of illness associated with swimming at the affected site.

As a result of the monitoring program, three public advisories were issued by the health department during swimming season last year. The advisories consisted of one each at May Day Park and Fairhope Beach and the Alba Club on Dog River. The advisories were lifted after only a few days when monitoring results indicated Enterococci levels below the EPA standard.

Additional information is available on the EPA's Web site titled "Beach Watch." The Internet address is <http://www.epa.gov/ost/beaches>.

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