



California Coastal Coalition
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NEWS RELEASE

California Coastal Coalition Exposes Misleading Statements by Clean Beaches Council Regarding California's Beaches

July 1, 2004

ENCINITAS, Calif. – Newspapers and television stations around the country recently reported on an annual list of “Clean and Healthy Beaches” issued by the Clean Beaches Council, a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. The Clean Beaches Council (CBC) gives a misleading impression that the water quality at California's beaches is unsafe compared to beaches on the East Coast.

The truth is, in regard to water quality, California's beaches compare favorably with beaches elsewhere.

In a June 25 interview with Cable News Network, the president of the CBC was asked why no California beaches made the list. Walter McLeod responded that his organization had tightened its criteria last year and that California beaches needed to “build up” before they could qualify for his list. The organization also supplied CNN with a map of “certified” beaches that conveys an impression no California beach is safe. McLeod then said, “There are clean beaches in 10 of our 30 coastal states,” implying that only the beaches on his list are safe.

The fact that no California cities are on the CBC list doesn't mean that the state's beaches are unhealthy. Rather, it means that no cities in the state – or along the entire West Coast – have deemed it necessary to pay CBC's mandatory \$2,500 per beach fee to be “certified.” As noted in its press release, www.cleanbeaches.org/MediaCenter/index2.cfm, the CBC only lists beaches that have been “officially certified” by them as “clean, healthy and environmentally well managed,” yet the water quality at those beaches may be worse than beaches in cities that have opted not to join the CBC's campaign.

What McLeod did not tell CNN or its viewers is that coastal cities and counties in California have rejected CBC's proposal to examine their beaches because state law requires them to do their own beach water testing and reporting of results. California's clean water statute is known as the “Public Right to Know Law” and it offers far more protection for swimmers and surfers than an annual “certification” by a third party.

CalCoast is an advocacy organization comprised of coastal communities and interest groups

www.calcoast.org

“California is so far ahead of the rest of the country in terms of ocean water quality that it’s ludicrous to suggest our beaches don’t meet the CBC’s standards,” said Steve Aceti of the California Coastal Coalition, a non-profit advocacy group comprised of coastal cities and counties in California. “We have the toughest state laws in the nation that require mandatory testing, reporting results and closures of beaches that don’t meet the highest standards. We don’t need a private organization in Washington, D.C., to put us on its pay-per-mention list.”

The state’s beaches are closely monitored by local government health agencies, and the results are analyzed and posted online. In addition, Heal the Bay, a respected environmental organization located in Santa Monica, California, issues an annual report card on California beaches at www.healthebay.org. In its latest report, Heal the Bay rated 70 per cent of California’s beaches as “excellent.” Heal the Bay does not charge cities and counties for its testing.

The California Coastal Coalition is calling on the Clean Beaches Council “clean up its act” and stop its campaign of misinformation. The CBC should merely refer to its “certified beaches” and leave it at that without misleading the public into thinking that beaches not on its list are unsafe. To do otherwise misleads the public and leaves cities and counties with the impression that they are being strong-armed into joining the CBC’s program.

State tourism officials say that California’s beaches attract 34 million visitors annually and that coastal tourism generates more than \$14 billion in direct spending. The kind of negative publicity that aired on CNN and other outlets across the nation can be devastating to the state’s economy, even though California is doing more about improving water quality than any state in the country.

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