

**State Water Resources Control Board****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Williams

**January 17, 2001**

SWRCB 01-001

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**“Clean Beaches Initiative” to Reduce the Number of Closures and Health Warnings on California’s World-Famous Beaches**

**SACRAMENTO** – California’s world-renowned beaches are threatened. Pollution from sewage spills and urban runoff are making the waters off many of Southern California’s popular beaches hazardous to human health. In 1999, the total number of days that all the state’s beaches were posted or closed due to contamination exceeded 5,000 days. In addition to the health issues, closures bring economic concerns.

Southern California beaches attract 175 million visitors each year, who spend more than \$1.5 billion during their visits. On a typical summer day, some of the more popular beaches attract 75,000 people. When a beach is closed due to contamination, the economic effect can be devastating to local business owners.

To combat the problem of contaminated ocean water, Gov. Gray Davis is proposing a “Clean Beaches Initiative”. This Initiative will coordinate and increase the efforts of the State Water Board and the nine Regional Water Quality Control Boards with the efforts of local, state and federal agencies. The result will be a significant decrease in contamination of beaches in California.

“The public health and economic threat to our beaches posed by polluted runoff is real,” said Winston Hickox, Secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. “The Clean Beaches Initiative will enable state and local agencies to address this contamination, making our beaches safer, ensuring the economic vitality of coastal areas.”

The proposed activities include assisting local agencies in areas that have chronic beach contamination problems and high beach usage, leveraging ongoing strong support from local communities. Measures to curb urban runoff include the diversion of dry weather flows from storm drains, construction of infiltration basins, catch basin inserts as well as isolating controllable sources of pollution. Construction and restoration of wetlands should decrease the amount of pathogens reaching beaches. The Initiative will also provide funding for source identification, allowing regulators to more quickly track pollution sources.

Preventative actions and the diversion of storm flows have already begun. The Initiative should accelerate these activities and result in a statewide reduction in the number of days of beach closures and postings by the Autumn of 2002. Beaches targeted by the Initiative’s local assistance projects are also expected to show significant reductions in closures and postings by the summer of 2002. Continued diligence on these two fronts will show greater reductions in closings and postings by 2010.

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