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Water quality declined last year at some Boston-area beaches

Chris Mehr emerged from the cold, leaden waters off Carson Beach Thursday and pronounced himself pleased by his brief dip.

“Not too bad,” said the 29-year-old real estate broker.

His fiancée looked at him skeptically. “Not appealing,” she said, her bikini still dry.

Yet the stretch of rocky sand along the coast of South Boston boasts some of the cleanest waters of any urban beach in the region, according to a new report from a local environmental group.

Last summer, Carson Beach was considered safe to swim in nearly every day of the swimming season, as were most of the other 15 public beaches along Boston Harbor.

Still, overall water quality at the beaches dipped from the year before, the report found, because of runoff from frequent storms.

The water was safe to swim in 92 percent of the time last year, down from 96 percent of the time in 2014, according to the report by Save the Harbor/Save the Bay. The group analyzed thousands of bacteria samples in nine communities, from Nahant and Lynn on the North Shore to Quincy and Hull on the South Shore.

“Though the overall numbers are down a bit this year, because of last year’s frequent storms, the report card still contains good news for many of our beaches, including those in South Boston, which are still the cleanest urban beaches in the country,” said Bruce Berman, a spokesman for the group.

City Point, M Street, and Pleasure Bay in South Boston, as well as Nantasket and Winthrop beaches, were safe to swim in every day last summer, the report found.

But King’s Beach, which runs from Lynn to Swampscott, was safe to swim in only 75 percent of the time, while Tenean Beach in Dorchester was safe to swim in just 71 percent of the time, the report found.



Twins Aniyah and Aliyah Montero, 4, of Milton enjoyed the water while visiting Carson Beach in South Boston with their mother Alyssa Montero on Thursday.

Such pollution undercuts longstanding efforts to clean up Boston Harbor, Berman said.

“The persistent pollution problems . . . continue to jeopardize the public’s health and prevent residents from enjoying the benefits of our \$5 billion investment in clean water,” Berman said. “While we are pleased that Boston Water and Sewer has identified several significant sources of bacterial contamination in Dorchester; we look forward to working with local state and local government to finish the job we began together 30 years ago.”

State officials said they plan to set aside more money to improve the region’s water quality.

“The Baker-Polito administration remains committed to ensuring the state’s beaches remain not only accessible for all to use, but also safe for public enjoyment,” Matthew Beaton, the state’s secretary of energy and environmental affairs, said in a statement.

Last year, Save the Bay compared Boston Harbor beaches with other urban beaches around the country and found they were among the cleanest in the country, even surpassing Waikiki Beach in Honolulu and South Beach in Miami.

Berman has attributed the region’s relatively pristine beaches to the cleanup of Boston Harbor over the past few

decades. The cleanup, which was court-ordered, included the modernization of the Deer Island sewage treatment plant in the 1990s and the building of a 9.5-mile tunnel to carry treated sewage far from shore.

The cleanup also included a 2-mile-long, \$225 million tunnel under Day Boulevard in South Boston that carries sewage and storm water away from city beaches to a pumping station at Conley Terminal in South Boston.

Still, many of the beaches are required to close when it rains, which flushes contaminants from sewers and drains into the ocean. Last year, 125 “red flags” were raised on Boston-area beaches to

signify dangerously high levels of bacteria, compared with 51 in 2014 and 109 in 2013, the group found.

That increase came even as rainfall last swimming season declined by more than an inch from the previous year.

On Carson Beach on Thursday afternoon, Luis Acevedo said he remained leery of swimming there.

“I’d say I’m 70 percent comfortable with the water,” said Acevedo, 39, who was enjoying a day off from his job waiting tables. “That means I’d go in, but I wouldn’t go in for long. It’s a little less funky than it used to be.”

Taylor Pfromer and a few friends walked gingerly near the water, keeping a close watch for glass, condoms, and needles, they said.

But as the 20-year-old junior at Boston University peered at the ground around her bare feet, she found something she wasn’t expecting — a \$20 bill.

“This is the kind of litter I want to see more of,” she said.

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