



EU rules on bathing water

Summary: EU has rules on water quality that enable members of the public to find out the water quality of any beach they may wish to visit in the EU.

The EU Bathing Water directive of 1976 is one of the earliest pieces of EU legislation on the environment. Its aim is to protect public health and the environment by keeping coastal and inland bathing waters free from pollution.

The directive has led to the improvement of coastal beaches in all member states with a seaboard. Of the UK's 567 coastal bathing areas monitored in 2006, 99.6% met the EU's mandatory water quality criteria.

An updated law in 2006 establishes four levels of quality: poor, sufficient, good and excellent.

You can check whether any beach in the EU has passed the strict quality standards which include monitoring for E.Coli and Intestinal Enterococci contamination. These are the main health threat to bathers. You can use an interactive map to explore water quality of beaches:

<http://www.eyearth.eu/>

Blue Flag beaches

Blue Flag beaches started in France in 1985 when some coastal resorts were awarded a blue flag based on criteria covering sewage treatment and water quality. The idea was endorsed by the European Commission as an initiative in the 1987 European Year of the Environment. In 1992 the programme started using the EU Bathing Water directive for its mandatory criteria.

The sponsoring organisation for what has become a prestigious and internationally recognised award is the Foundation for Environmental Education. Today there are 37 countries within and outside Europe taking part in the Blue Flag programme. In 2008, 3200 beaches and marinas were awarded the flag. Eighty-eight were in England.

Criteria relate to water quality (compliance with standards for excellence), environmental management, safety and services, and environmental education and display of information. A Blue Flag is awarded for one year.

For more on Blue Flag beaches:

<http://blueflag.org/>

or for more on bathing water quality:

http://ec.europa.eu/environment/water/water-bathing/index_en.htm