VWMC members: Please check out the information below before heading to the beach this summer and help spread the word about these sources of information by forwarding this announcement to your colleagues and friends.

1.) Virginia Department of Health (VDH): Beach Monitoring Program
2.) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):
   a.) Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Program
   b.) EPA’s Draft 2014 Performance Criteria
   c.) Beach Advisory and Closing Online Notification System (BEACON)
3.) “Beaches and Bacteria”
4.) Protect Your Health While Swimming at the Beach this July 4th

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1.) Virginia Department of Health (VDH): Beach Monitoring Program
   -- Bacteria levels in beach water are monitored at 46 public beaches in Virginia on the Chesapeake Bay and Atlantic Ocean during the swimming season (May-September). Water samples are collected weekly by Local Health Departments and analyzed by local laboratories for enterococci bacteria. If bacteria levels exceed Virginia’s Water Quality Standard of 104 colony forming units (cfu)/100 mL of water, a swimming advisory is issued.

   New for 2014: Follow VDH’s Beach Monitoring Program on Twitter (@VDHBeach) to receive notifications of the status of current swimming advisories: https://twitter.com/VDHBeach.

   The VDH website -- http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/DEE/BeachMonitoring/ -- contains:
   -- Swimming Advisories and Monitored Beaches Map (uses Google Maps)
   -- Beach Monitoring Data (by year)
   -- Frequently Asked Questions: VDH-Issued Swimming Advisories
   -- Local Beaches Information
   -- Brochure: Safely Enjoy Virginia’s Natural Waters (Como Disfrutar de las Aguas Naturales de Virginia Sin Peligros)
   -- Local Health Department Contacts for Beach Monitoring
   And more.

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2.) U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):
   a.) Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Program -- http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/beaches/ -- This program focuses on the following five areas to meet the goals of improving public health and environmental protection for beach goers and providing the public with information about the quality of their beach water:
   - strengthening beach standards and testing
   - providing faster laboratory test methods
   - predicting pollution
   - investing in health and methods research
   - informing the public.

   b.) EPA’s Draft 2014 National Beach Guidance and Required Performance Criteria for State Grants: -- http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/beachgrants/guidance.cfm -- The National Beach Guidance and Required Performance Criteria for Grants outlines the performance criteria that eligible coastal or Great Lakes state, tribal, or local governments must meet to receive grants to implement coastal recreation water monitoring and public notification programs under the BEACH Act.

   EPA’s goal is to encourage a more comprehensive approach to tiered monitoring and notification plans by using better historical information and new tools (such as modeling and rapid methods). EPA has added
important technical information and revised policies that have occurred during the last decade. In this revised draft, for example, EPA has updated scientific and technical references and incorporated key aspects from the 2012 Recreational Water Quality Criteria. EPA is also emphasizing the use of tools - such as sanitary surveys - to help evaluate and manage beaches, and discussions of newer beach notification and communication tools, such as social media, websites and emails.

In addition, EPA proposed the requirement that states and territories use Beach Action Values, which would require that swimming advisories be issued when bacteria results exceed 60 cfu/100 ml, opposed to the current Virginia water quality standard of 104 cfu/100 ml.

c.) Beach Advisory and Closing Online Notification System (BEACON) – People can use EPA’s BEach Advisory and Closing Online Notification system (BEACON) to access historical advisory information. BEACON carries water quality and pollution testing information for more than 6,000 U.S. beaches, based on data provided by states, territories and tribes. Users can access mapped location data for beaches and water monitoring stations, monitoring results for pollutants such as bacteria and algae, as well as reports that combine notifications and water quality monitoring data. For more information, visit http://watersgeo.epa.gov/beacon2/.

3.) "Beaches and Bacteria" – This article was first published August 2004 in Virginia Water Central, newsletter of the Virginia Water Resources Research Center. It was updated in January 2014. The article is available at http://vawatercentralnewsgrouper.wordpress.com/2014/01/29/beaches-and-bacteria-january-2014-update-of-an-august-2004-virginia-water-central-article/ and describes:

- The Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act
- Virginia’s bacteria standards
- The types of indicator organisms monitored at Virginia’s beaches
- How people responsible for beach closures/advisories decide what is safe
- The difference between a beach advisory and a beach closure
- Microbial Source Tracking

4.) Protect Your Health While Swimming at the Beach – VDH recommends the following simple steps to protect your health while swimming at the beach (available at http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/DEE/BeachMonitoring/):

- Observe Swimming Advisories; do not enter the water at a beach when swimming advisory signs are posted.
- Avoid swallowing water or having water forced up your nose when swimming; natural waters may contain disease-causing organisms that can cause gastrointestinal or neurological illnesses.
- Avoid swimming for a few days after heavy rainfall; bacteria levels are likely to be high and disease-causing organisms are more likely to be present after rainfall due to pollution from land runoff and other sources.
- Prevent direct contact of cuts and open wounds with recreational water; natural waters may contain disease-causing organisms that may cause skin infections.
- Avoid swimming in areas where dead fish are present; dead fish may indicate that water conditions are poor or hazardous materials are in the water. Please contact the Department of Environmental Quality (804-698-4000) if you observe a fish kill.
- Don’t swim if you are ill or have a weakened immune system; some organisms are opportunistic and may only cause illness when you are already ill or your immune system is weakened.
- Shower with soap after swimming; showering helps remove potential disease-causing organisms.
- Swim away from fishing piers, pipes, drains, and water flowing from storm drains onto a beach.
- Do not dispose of trash, pet waste, or dirty diapers on the beach.

This special announcement is sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency through the Virginia Department of Health as a grant to the Virginia Water Monitoring Council. To learn more about the Council, see our website at [http://www.VirginiaWMC.org](http://www.VirginiaWMC.org) or contact Jane Walker at the address below. If you have water-monitoring related news of regional or statewide interest, send it to Jane Walker and ask that it be distributed to the VWMC membership.

Tax-deductible contributions can be made to the VWMC to support our information updates and other VWMC activities. Make checks payable to: "Virginia Tech Foundation" and on the memo portion of the check, include "Fund #872802." Mail contributions to Jane Walker, VWMC administrator at the address below.

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