



Dani Palmer/EO Media Group

Hannah Moore with the Oregon Beach Monitoring Program looks out over the ocean after testing water at the Gower Street outfall in Cannon Beach during this summer's season.

Standards: Four health advisories along the Oregon Coast were issued this year

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A matter of public safety

The beach monitoring program tracks Oregon beaches from Memorial Day to Labor Day and issues public health advisories on its website and inserts beach warning signs when bacteria readings are high.

People who ingest water with high bacteria levels may experience gastrointestinal or flu-like symptoms, according to the EPA. An Oregon State University study found that 40 percent of 500 surfers surveyed from the Pacific Northwest reported ear infections or discharge at some point during surfing, 30 percent a sore throat or cough, 16 percent diarrhea, 10 percent a fever and 7 percent vomiting.

The monitoring program works with the Surfrider Foundation on providing swimmers and surfers with the opportunity to report water contact-related illnesses.

This year, the program issued four health advisories along the Oregon Coast, including one in Cannon Beach. In 2014, there were 13. In the last five years, Chetock said there have been 18 advisories along the North Coast alone. That number would have jumped to 43 if the new standards had been applied.

From 2010 to 2015, the monitoring program conducted 3,464 samplings along the Oregon Coast, 88 of which exceeded the current guidelines. That number would rise to 206 if the new guidelines were used.

Program staff anticipate an increase in advisories in 2017, which could place a strain on their limited funds if they have a bad year like 2014.

More demand on staff could mean fewer beaches monitored. Currently, the program monitors 16 of Oregon's more than 90 beaches during its summer season. Chetock said they plan to use historical data and public input to decide which sites to sample in 2017.

Limited funding

Ryan Cruse, Blue Water Task Force field coordinator for the Surfrider Foundation, attended Newport's informational meeting. According to Cruse, Surfrider is working at the national level to ensure continued funding for the Beach Act, which provides funding for the monitoring program. "Our ultimate goal here in Oregon is to help secure additional state funding for the monitoring program, so that they'll have the capacity to expand the great work

they are currently doing," he said.

Chetock said partnerships with local communities, such as Cannon Beach, could help fill gaps.

The Blue Water Task Force tests beaches from Seaside to Port Orford. Cruse said they'll "continue to monitor with the same frequency when the new BAV takes place" and added "it would be great if the state utilized our monitoring program results."

The task force uses the same EPA testing method the monitoring program does. Volunteers and six labs would "easily fill any gaps" created by the new guidelines and funding constraints, he said.

Finding the source

In addition to the possible decrease in testing sites, residents and environmental groups like Surfrider expressed concern about public notification of high readings and freshwater results.

The monitoring program tests freshwater runoff, but unlike saltwater, will not issue an advisory if high levels of contamination are detected. This could put beachgoers at risk, particularly at the Gower Street outfall in Cannon Beach, Cruse said.

Although they are limited in actions they can take, Chetock noted that program staff do test freshwater runoff so they may identify the source of contamination.

The program isn't able to lead investigations into the cause of high readings, but it can provide data, technical support and guidance if a city chooses to address the issue. Staff are finalizing this year's monitoring data and searching for trends.

In its blog about the bacteria action level change, Surfrider acknowledged the program's limited authority and encouraged residents to ask the Department of Environmental Quality to investigate an advisory system for contaminated freshwater.

Some, like Oregon's state parks, have taken steps to rectify problems.

"There are other communities that just don't want to acknowledge it because of the tourism aspect," Chetock said. "They don't want to scare people off beaches because they want the business."

But solutions need to be found because notification alone is "not working right now."

The next step

Now that the monitoring program's public meetings

are done for the time being, Chetock said they will review comments and reach out to coastal areas in the next couple of months for discussions.

The Department of Environmental Quality is also developing rules to revise Oregon's water quality standards for bacteria. Aron Borok with department's water quality division said the state will hold hearings early next year to review proposed revisions.

Locally, the Surfrider Foundation and Ecola Creek Watershed Council have offered Cannon Beach officials assistance in notifying the public faster of high bacteria readings, and in reviewing the city's wastewater and sewer infrastructure to find a solution to the issue.



The Daily Astorian/Submitted Photo

Gearhart resident Shannon Smith has been trying for several years to renovate her historic livery for use as an events center.

Gearhart: Next court date is scheduled for Nov. 17

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According to Kearns, local standards were not clear enough to determine if Smith had "violated the standard."

With 82 short-term rental properties in Gearhart, Kearns said Smith is "renting" her property to guests, an activity unregulated by the city. A conditional use permit to hold weddings was not necessary, he said, because numerous other commercial activities are allowed in Gearhart, without a special use permit, among them, short-term rental of residential property.

"She's renting her property for short-term use for people who want to have their wedding there, their gathering there," Kearns said in October.

The city is considering adoption of new regulations of properties offering short-term property rentals. "My client is the only person in Gearhart who needs a certificate of occupancy and a conditional use permit," Kearns said during the October hearing.

In his finding, Orr said the city ordinance failed to provide adequate guidance to sustain the charges against Smith.

"It appears clear that the ordinance drafters failed to enumerate the numbers of attendees or quality of disruptions to the neighborhood ambiance to convert a permitted use into a conditional use," Orr wrote in his decision. "This lack of a clear line or definition is a vex-



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian
Shannon Smith after winning a verdict in Gearhart court Monday. She will face more charges for running what city officials say is a commercial business in a residential zone later this month.

inance spells out only seven permitted uses by a property owner, but finds "no reference, permission, restriction nor regulation whatsoever for parties, wedding parties, large group gatherings, family reunions, class reunions and the like," Orr said. "The conclusion this court must reach is that the city drafters had not considered the use when writing the Gearhart zoning ordinance, and therefore had not intended to prohibit wedding parties at residences for future gain."

In his decision, Orr recommended the city draft an ordinance with "greater clarity." He urged the City Council to "refine and revise" its residential zoning ordinance in a timely fashion.

Smith faces further violations for unauthorized use from events in August and September, and administrative fines totaling \$30,000 administered since 2012.

The next court date, to consider additional \$500 zoning violations at Neacoxie Barn in August, is scheduled for Nov. 17.

ing question for the court." Gearhart's zoning ordi-

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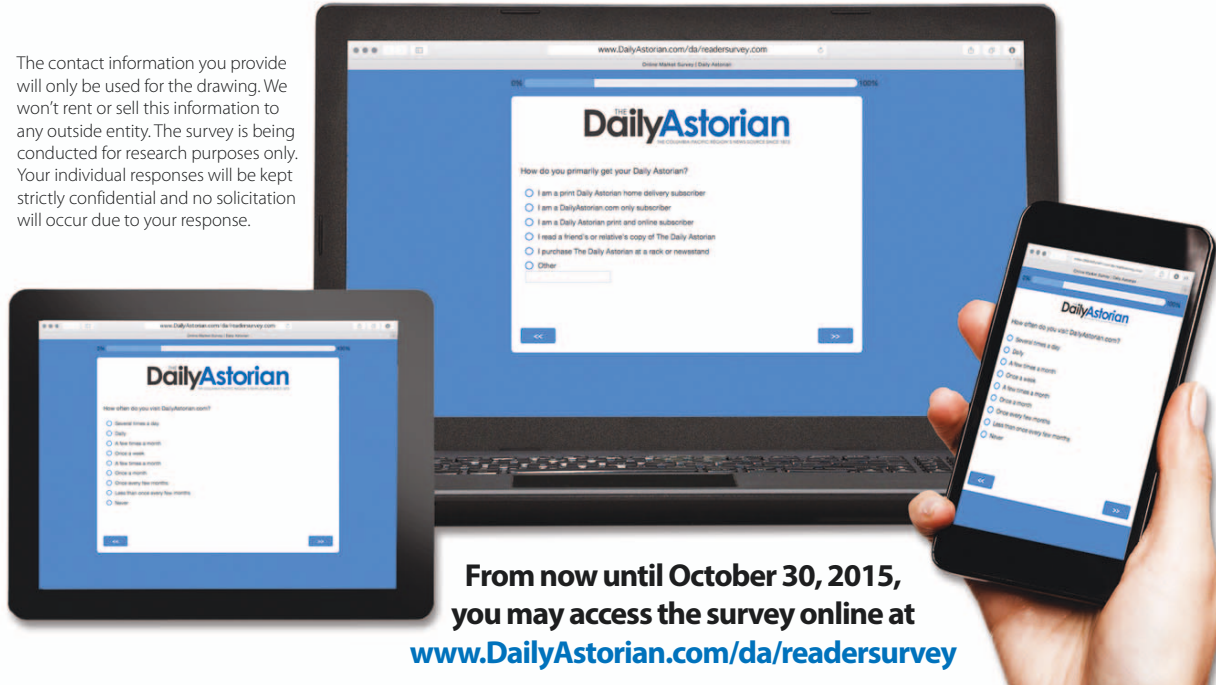


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