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## News Release

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Donna S. Francy

614-430-7769

[dsfrancy@usgs.gov](mailto:dsfrancy@usgs.gov)

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# To Swim or Not to Swim?

Concerns about water quality at beaches along the Great Lakes have prompted the need to better understand when waters are safe for recreation. A new collaborative project is aimed at improving information for beach managers when they are faced with deciding whether to close beaches or issue advisories to protect public health. This collaborative effort will draw on the expertise of U.S. Geological Survey and other federal, state and local agencies.

The project has been funded through interagency implementation of the President's Ocean Action Plan for 2008 and is expected to be funded through 2012. This research represents a broad commitment by USGS to the Plan.

"The strong existing partnerships and scientific expertise needed to address Great Lakes recreational water quality issues made this Great Lakes partnership a perfect candidate to address the Ocean Action Plan and its near term research priorities," said John Haines, USGS Coastal and Marine Geology Program Coordinator. "This partnership will significantly improve our understanding of the factors related to beach closures, and will provide important new tools and information Great Lakes beach managers need for effective decision making."

Scientists will focus on improving water-quality forecasting by enhancing and expanding models that help beach managers decide if beach advisories or closures are necessary. They will continue work to identify processes that influence the occurrence and abundance of pathogens; identify and evaluate rapid methods of monitoring pathogens at beaches; and improve communication with beach managers.

"Since 2000, we have partnered with the USGS in Ohio to develop the Nowcast system, which allows us to post beach advisories on the Internet that are based on today's conditions rather than yesterday's," said Jill Lis, Supervisor at the Cuyahoga County Board of Health. "In 2006, we were the first to provide same-day, near-real-time water-quality information to the public."

"Beach monitoring efforts, strategies, and communication have improved tremendously through the knowledge and research efforts of the USGS, but it has also raised more complex questions about factors affecting water quality," said Lis, "This project will allow for these important questions to be appropriately explored and ultimately assist us in better protecting the public's health through improved rapid decision making."

To strengthen this partnership, the Beach Health Initiative Steering Committee was formed consisting of key partners that will provide input and guidance on research direction for this project. This committee will continue the communication that began at the joint 2005 EPA, NOAA, USGS and Great Lakes Beach Association Beach Health Research Needs Workshop where beach managers provided input and feedback on the information and decision making tools they needed to assist them in protecting public health at their beaches.

More information about Nowcast and USGS beach monitoring research is available at [http://oh.water.usgs.gov/beach\\_index.htm](http://oh.water.usgs.gov/beach_index.htm).

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