

The Virgin Islands Consortium

DPNR Says It's Adopting More Stringent Threshold For Beach Water Quality Program

Health / **Published On February 23, 2018 09:54 PM /**

Staff **February 23, 2018**



The Department of Planning and Natural Resources (D.P.N.R.) said on Friday that it has adopted the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) established beach action value (BAV), for future weekly beaches environmental assessment and coastal health (BEACH) advisories. According to a release D.P.N.R. issued, the new BAV threshold value for enterococci bacteria is set at 70 cfu/100mL, which is more stringent than the previous threshold value of 104 cfu/100mL.

The BEACH Act of 2000, which established the BEACH program in the USVI, directed EPA to conduct studies associated with pathogens and human health, and to publish new or revised criteria recommendations for pathogens and pathogen indicators based

on those studies, according to the release. The 2012 recommended water quality criteria (RWQC) meet those requirements and replace the outdated 1986 RWQC. As part of this update, D.P.N.R. said it has adopted these criteria into the 2015 WQS regulations (12 VIRR §186) for enterococci bacteria as well as the use of the BAV.

Enterococci bacteria, like various other bacteria strains, can cause illnesses in persons who come into direct contact with contaminated water. The 2012 RWQC rely on the latest research and science, including studies that show a link between illness and fecal contamination in recreational waters. When analyzing water for enterococci bacteria, its concentration is measured in number of bacteria colonies per 100mL of water (cfu/100mL). The BAV threshold is set at 70 cfu/100mL, which is more stringent than the previous threshold value of 104 cfu/100mL, derived from the 1986 RWQC. While the old threshold is still considered to be protective of human health, the new BAV value has been determined by EPA to be a better precautionary tool to provide an early alert to beachgoers, including families with children or elderly.

D.P.N.R. stressed that while an increase in beaches listed as unsafe for swimming or fishing in its weekly beach advisories is expected, the quality of the waters of the USVI is not affected. The department said the policy change only serves to improve its notification process to the public of the potential risk to human health due to designated beach use.

You may contact D.P.N.R.'s BEACH program staff at (340) 774-3320 in St. Thomas, or at (340) 643-6013 in St. Croix, should you have any questions or concerns.