

Press Release No. 37/2010

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Unadulterated swimming fun Good water quality in Germany's bathing waters

The EU Commission published its statistics on the bathing water quality for 2009 season on 10 June 2010. 99 percent of Germany's bathing waters meet the quality standards set by the EC Bathing Water Directive. 81 percent of bathing waters even meet the more stringent requirements to be classified as 'good quality'.

Bathing waters on the coast, in lakes and rivers are not reserved for bathers only: as with all bodies of water, they are exposed to a great many outside factors and uses and as such, are subject to possible pollution. Water quality is therefore monitored at regular intervals. Since the first EU Bathing Water Directive entered into force in 1976 bathing water quality has improved constantly and has remained at a high level since 2001. The new EC Bathing Water Directive has been applicable to bathing waters in Germany since 2008.

A total of 2279 bathing waters in Germany were monitored in accordance with this directive, of which 373 are on the coast of the North and Baltic Seas, 1873 are inland waters, and 33 are along rivers. The low number of river bathing areas is due to one fundamental problem, namely that most rivers have variable water quality as heavy rainfall, for instance, can lead to a high level of pollution. Therefore, it is rare that good quality is achieved at a constant rate in rivers. Of those 33 bathing areas four had been closed due to pollution. Sometimes strong current or shipping prevents their use as bathing waters.

Regular testing of bathing water quality is merely one means by which to protect bathers from pollution. The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) approves of the new directive in that it promotes active bathing water management. By 2001, all the *Laender* must create a so-called bathing water profile for every one of their bathing waters which must, among other things, identify all sources of pollution that might affect water quality as potential problems with cyanobacteria (blue-green algae). This will help to detect potential health risks in due time and to take appropriate preventative measures. Last year, there were 16 bathing waters that were either temporarily or entirely closed due to the presence of cyanobacteria. Further measures to prevent eutrophication of bodies of water are necessary.

The EC Bathing Water Directive calls for comprehensive public education and participation. Monitoring authorities must make their bathing water profiles for every bathing area available to the general public by 2012 at the latest, either through notice boards or via Internet. They must also publish the results of their analyses in a timely manner. A list of bathing waters must be drawn up prior to the start of the bathing season, and should one's favourite bathing area not be featured on the list, the local authorities will be glad to provide further information.

The results of the previous year's bathing season analyses are published on the Internet every year at: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/themes/water/status-and-monitoring/state-of-bathing-water-1/bathing-water-data-viewer>.

The EU quality of bathing water report for the 2009 season is available for free download on the Internet at: <http://www.eea.europa.eu/de/publications/qualitaet-der-badegewaesser84-badesaison-2009-de>.

Information on current water quality for the 2010 bathing season is available on the websites of the various *Laender*, which can be accessed via the Federal Ministry for Environment at: <http://www.bmu.de/gewaesserschutz/fb/badegewaesser/doc/2435.php>.

Dessau-Roßlau, 21 June 2010