

## **Public acceptance of short term pollution warning and beach closure in UK: the results of opinion surveys in Scotland and England.**

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Beach closure is uncommon in the UK. Closure is most likely to take place if there is a danger to the public. This could be due events such as oil, chemicals or other hazard on the beach. Beaches are not normally closed for reasons of poor water quality. The prediction trials are aimed at introducing robust to give reliable information to the public allowing them to make their own decisions regarding whether or not to bathe.

Scotland: During the 2003 and 2004 bathing water seasons the Scottish Executive (SE) with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) trialled predictive water quality signage at ten beaches in Scotland. The electronic matrix signs displayed real time daily predictions of bathing water quality. The water quality predictions were based on local rainfall or river flow data. The messages displayed are:

Good Water Quality is Predicted Today

or

Bathing Not Advised Today – Risk of Poor Quality Water

The prediction trial proved to have 98% accuracy. The signs have been retained and are still operation during this bathing water season.

In August 2003 a public opinion survey commissioned by SE was carried out “to understand how, when and why the public uses beaches and bathing waters in Scotland and to identify public attitudes towards public information real time signs systems on water quality”. A representative sample of the adult population in Scotland, together with a separate survey of residents living in areas near to beaches were interviewed. Views on the real time information system were very positive with 56% of respondents stating that this type of information was “very useful”. The real time information system was seen as useful for providing information which would be useful in deciding whether to bathe or even visit the beach. Respondents with children were more interested in the information than others, with safety being of concern.

England and Wales: A pilot study to assess the feasibility of predicting the expected bathing water quality at ten beaches is being undertaken by the Environmental Agency of England and Wales (EA). The predictions are based on the relationship between water quality and rainfall at each location. The daily prediction will be displayed by means of a poster at the beach. The poster will show one of the following messages:

Good prediction: good water quality is predicted today.

Poor prediction: bathing not advised today – risk of poor water quality.

No prediction available: prediction not available for this site today.

Beach users will be asked their opinion of the system. This study will end on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009, consequently the results will not be available until after that date. It is hoped however that some early indication of the outcome of the study will be available to report to the conference.