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**Florida Observes National Coast Week September 20-27**

--State's Premiere *Healthy Beaches* Program Exemplifies Dedication to Preserving "Coastal Treasures"--

**Tallahassee** -- Capping years of progressive initiatives aimed at preserving Florida's pristine beaches and water resources, the Florida Department of Health (DOH) will participate in National Coast Week during the week of September 20 -27.

The week, which is themed "National Coastal Week 2003: Living on the Edge," will feature a series of events held around the country to celebrate the vibrancy and beauty of the nations' coastal communities and resources. Planned events will raise awareness about critical ocean and coastal issues through various community workshops, beach cleanups, nature tours, water monitoring and seagrass planting activities.

"Florida is uncompromisingly committed to maintaining the highest standard of water quality and beach preservation," said DOH Secretary John O. Agwunobi, M.D., M.B.A. "National Coastal Week is a time to join the nation in recognizing the importance of these endeavors."

Standing as an example of the type of beach preservation celebrated during this week, Florida's nationally-modeled, *Healthy Beaches Monitoring Program* demonstrates the quality work being conducted at 305 sites in its 34 coastal counties statewide. To keep public beaches safe for swimming, each of the counties collects biweekly water samples. They are then sent to a DOH-certified state laboratory where they are checked for enterococci and fecal coliform bacteria -- microorganisms that are indicators of contamination, which can cause disease, infections or rashes in high concentrations. After the county health department receives the results from the laboratory, they are entered into a computer database with results posted immediately on the department's web page.

Earlier this year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded DOH's Environmental Health Division a nearly \$545,000 grant for weekly monitoring activities at frequently used beaches, helping to ensure Florida's beaches remain safe and sanitary for public use.

For more information about the Florida Healthy Beaches program or beach sampling findings, visit [www.doh.state.fl.us](http://www.doh.state.fl.us) and select *Beach Water Quality* from the pull down menu.

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