

Blue Flag Canada

Beach Criteria

blueflag.ca



**SWIM
DRINK
FISH**

Connecting people with water
Blue Flag Canada Operator





The Blue Flag is an internationally recognized and respected eco-label that is awarded annually to beaches, marinas and tourism boats, which have met strict criteria. Awarded Blue Flag beaches must meet criteria in four categories: Water Quality, Environmental Management, Environmental Education, and Safety & Services.

The Blue Flag program was founded in 1987 and is run internationally by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a non-profit organization based in Denmark. There are currently over 4,500 Blue Flags flying in 47 countries.

Canada's National Operator of the Blue Flag program is Swim Drink Fish, a national environmental charity.

Swim Drink Fish set out on a mission in 2001 to ensure that everyone could have access to swimmable, drinkable, fishable water. We do this by connecting people to water, collecting water quality data, sharing this information, and ultimately restoring water quality and habitat.

Swim Drink Fish is working with communities across Canada to make "connect, collect, share, restore," a collective stewardship experience.

The Blue Flag Canada program is key to creating this experience for communities with beaches, marinas, and boats across Canada. In 2020 Blue Flags were awarded to 29 beaches and nine marinas across the country.

WHY FLY A BLUE FLAG

Out of 47 countries polled by Blue Flag international, Canadians consistently demonstrated significant interest in the Blue Flag program. In Canada, a site flying a Blue Flag is regarded by the public as a symbol of excellence for environmental, educational, safety, and accessibility criteria.

Similar to that of Swim Drink Fish, a central focus of the Blue Flag program is connecting people with nature so they can learn about their environment. When people feel connected to water and the environment, they are much more likely to protect it.

What makes the Blue Flag program so unique and successful is its holistic nature. The Blue Flag standards ensure that Blue Flag beaches are not only clean and environmentally sustainable but provide the facilities and services that tourists are looking for around the world.

These standards are why the World Health Organization, the World Tourism Organization, and the United Nations Environmental Programme embrace the Blue Flag program. Every year Blue Flag beaches must reapply to maintain the credibility of the Blue Flag program.

CREDIBILITY FOR BLUE FLAG BEACHES

The Blue Flag beach criteria are organized into four main categories: Water Quality, Environmental Management, Environmental Education and Safety and Services. The criteria are further categorized as either imperative or guideline. Most beach criteria are imperative, meaning the beach must comply with them to receive Blue Flag accreditation. Guideline criteria should be met, but are not mandatory.

Every summer, Swim Drink Fish performs random and announced control visits to Blue Flag beaches during the swimming season to ensure that the beach is meeting all the criteria. Blue Flag International will conduct random and announced control visits to Blue Flag countries during the swimming season. Reapplications and control visits are critical to ensure that all awarded beaches uphold the integrity of the program.

If a local authority or beach operator is responsible for violations of national environmental regulations or is in disagreement with the objectives and spirit of the Blue Flag program, Swim Drink Fish and FEE have the right to refuse or withdraw Blue Flag accreditation from any beach.



THE 7 STEPS TO THE BLUE FLAG AWARD

1. **CONTACT US** – If you're thinking about getting your beach certified, contact Swim Drink Fish . Our job is to help communities fly a Blue Flag. As part of a national and international network of beach operators, we can draw from the knowledge and experience of beach operators around the world.

2. **FEASIBILITY STUDY** – Before you can apply for the Blue Flag award, we will conduct a feasibility study of your beach. In addition to reviewing water quality data and other documentation, Swim Drink Fish staff will meet with you to assess the beach and facilities. Following the site visit, we will prepare a feasibility study report outlining the steps required to meet all Blue Flag criteria. This report will provide a helpful framework to guide your initiatives.

3. **CANDIDATE PHASE** – If your municipality/ park agrees to adopt the recommendations of the feasibility study and proceed with Blue Flag certification, your beach will enter the pilot phase and become a Blue Flag “candidate.” The purpose of the pilot phase is to allow the time for your municipality/park to implement the recommendations of the feasibility study. It is recommended that a Blue Flag “candidate” works to implement the feasibility study recommendations over the summer season prior to the following years’ Blue Flag application phase.

4. **BLUE FLAG APPLICATION** – Once the beach complies with Blue Flag Canada’s criteria (listed in the following section), Swim Drink Fish will invite you to apply during the next application period. We will guide you through this process. Application forms and supporting documentation, including four years of water quality data, are submitted to Swim Drink Fish each December (See sample application form Appendix A).

5. **NATIONAL BLUE FLAG JURY** - The National Jury reviews all the Canadian applications in February each year and forwards successful applications to an International Jury for final approval. Independent experts in environmental education, water quality, environmental management, safety and tourism take part in the National and International Jury meetings. Swim Drink Fish helps facilitate the jury review process, but does not vote on Blue Flag awards.

6. **INTERNATIONAL BLUE FLAG JURY** – The International Jury reviews all applications annually in April. Once the jury announces its decision, Swim Drink Fish shares the results with Canadian applicants. These results will be kept confidential until the official public announcement in May. This includes a national press release announcing Canada’s Blue Flag awardees and candidates.

7. **BLUE FLAG SEASON BEGINS!** – Once the beach is officially open for swimming, the beach operator can raise the Blue Flag! Many awarded beaches have flag-raising celebrations. Swim Drink Fish will help promote these events across its network. Blue Flag beaches are surveyed by Swim Drink Fish throughout the season to ensure they continue to meet all criteria. We promote all of Canada’s Blue Flag on www.BlueFlag.ca and www.greatlakes.guide. We also share updated water quality on Swim Guide: www.theswimguide.org.

1 - CONTACT SWIM DRINK FISH

2 - FEASIBILITY STUDY

- Fill out a feasibility study application
- Blue Flag Canada performs an audit of the beach and provides a feasibility report

DOES THE BEACH MEET THE BLUE FLAG CRITERIA?

NO

YES

3 - CANDIDATE PHASE

To apply beach operators must implement the feasibility report recommendations

YES

4 - BLUE FLAG APPLICATION

Applications are submitted to Blue Flag Canada in December

YES

5 - CANADIAN JURY

The national jury reviews all applications in February

YES

6 - INTERNATIONAL JURY

The international jury reviews all applications in April

YES

7 - BLUE FLAG SEASON BEGINS

Blue Flag Criteria for Beaches

Criteria numbered in red are Imperative. Criteria numbered in blue are Guideline

Environmental Education and Information



- 1 - Information about the Blue Flag program must be displayed. (pg. 5)
- 2 - At least five environmental education initiatives must be offered and promoted to beach users. (pg. 5)
- 3 - Information about recreational water quality must be displayed. (pg. 6)
- 4 - Information about the local ecosystem must be displayed. (pg. 6)
- 5 - A code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed. (pg. 7)
- 6 - The beach must fully comply with water quality sampling and frequency requirements. (pg. 7)

Water Quality



- 7 - The beach must fully comply with water quality sampling and frequency requirements. (pg. 7)
- 8 - The beach must fully comply with the requirements for water quality analysis. (pg. 8)
- 9 - No industrial, wastewater or sewage-related discharges should affect the beach area. (pg. 9)
- 10 - The beach must comply with the Blue Flag microbiological standards for E.coli and intestinal enterococci (streptococci). (pg. 9)
- 11 - The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for the following physical and chemical parameters. (pg. 10)

Environmental Management



- 12 - The local authority/beach operator must establish a beach management committee. (pg. 12)
- 13 - The local authority/beach operator must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach. (pg. 12)
- 14 - Sensitive areas must be managed accordingly. (pg. 12)

- 15 - The beach must be clean. (pg. 13)
- 16 - Seaweed or natural debris must be left on the beach. (pg. 13)
- 17 - An adequate number of garbage bins must be available at the beach. They must be regularly maintained. (pg. 13)
- 18 - Recycling bins must be available at the beach. (pg. 14)
- 19 - The beach must have an adequate number of toilet or restroom facilities. (pg. 14)
- 20 - The restroom facilities must be kept clean. (pg. 14)
- 21 - The toilet or restroom facilities must have controlled sewage disposal. (pg. 14)
- 22 - Camping, driving and dumping are prohibited on the beach. (pg. 14)
- 23 - Domestic animals must be prohibited from the beach. (pg. 15)
- 24 - All buildings and beach equipment must be appropriately maintained. (pg. 15)
- 25 - Marine and sensitive freshwater habitats in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored. (pg. 15)

Safety and Services



- 26 - A sustainable means of transportation should be promoted in the beach area. (pg. 15)
- 27 - Appropriate public safety control measures must be implemented. (pg. 16)
- 28 - First aid equipment must be available on the beach. (pg. 17)
- 29 - Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place. (pg. 17)
- 30 - There must be the management of different users and uses of the beach to prevent conflicts and accidents. (pg. 17)
- 31 - There must be safety measures in place to protect users of the beach. (pg. 18)
- 32 - A supply of drinking water should be available at the beach. (pg. 18)
- 33 - At least one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have water access and facilities for the physically disabled. (pg. 18)



Environmental Education & Information

1 Information about the Blue Flag program must be displayed.

Imperative

Blue Flag Information Board

Once awarded a Blue Flag, your beach must have a Blue Flag information board put in place by the beginning of the swimming season. The information board tells visitors about the Blue Flag program, what your community is doing to meet the criteria, and what your beach has to offer. It points out where people can find key facilities and services like washrooms and first aid, and tells people who they can contact for any questions or concerns. The information board also has descriptions of the local ecosystem, advertises upcoming environmental education activities and posts the latest water quality results.

You want your information board to be seen and used, so it is a good idea to place it at a point of entry or another high-traffic location. For long beaches, there should be an equivalent information board in place at least every 500 metres. Blue Flag Canada has a Blue Flag information board template that can be adapted to incorporate local information. This template saves Blue Flag communities from designing an information board from scratch, and ensures the information board contains the following necessary information:

- 1. Blue flag logo**
- 2. Name of the beach**
- 3. Information about the Blue Flag program**
- 4. Contact information for the local, national and international Blue Flag representatives**
- 5. Information about recreational water quality**
- 6. Code of conduct**
- 7. Information about the local environment**
- 8. Map of the beach indicating location of facilities**
- 9. Safety precautions**
- 10. The period when the lifesaving equipment, lifeguards, and first aid, are available**
- 11. Explanation of the four categories of the Blue Flag criteria**
- 12. Length of the bathing season at your beach**
- 13. Information about environmental education activities**

2 Environmental education initiatives must be offered and promoted to beach users.

Imperative

The community must offer at least five environmental education initiatives during the Blue Flag season. Several of the initiatives should be provided at the beach and have a direct focus on the coastal and aquatic environment. The beach must promote all five of the educational initiatives. We suggest advertising the upcoming activities on the beach Information Board, on posters, at an information centre, park offices, bulletin boards, whiteboards or nearby restaurant and cafe boards. Swim Drink Fish will check the status of the educational initiatives during annual control visits.

The applicant doesn't need to organize all of the environmental education initiatives. We encourage partnerships with local organizations, such as "Friends of" groups, environmental NGOs, conservation authorities (for Ontario beaches), naturalist clubs or other community groups. Environmental education initiatives can also include setting up a Blue Flag information table at community events to raise awareness about the program and relevant environmental issues.



Environmental education initiatives can take many forms; we have divided them into the following categories:

- 1. Passive participation: Exhibits, films, presentations, slide shows, conferences, debates, etc.**
- 2. Active participation: Guided tours, educational games, beach cleanup days, photography or art contests, "adopt a beach" projects, eco-savenger hunts, environmental monitoring programs, etc.**
- 3. Training activities: Training sessions for teachers, municipal staff, lifeguards, cleaners, summer students, etc.**
- 4. Publishing and media: The production of leaflets, brochures, stickers, t-shirts, bags, interpretive signage, school and municipal newsletters, books, posters, radio broadcasts, etc.**
- 5. Blue Flag Environmental Information Centre: Blue Flag beaches are encouraged to have an Environmental Education Centre that can provide specific information about Blue Flag and environmental issues. A popular meeting area can be used as an information centre, so long as it offers activities and exhibitions and provides environmental information. The centre should be open to and have information for the general public, not just school children.**

3 Information about recreational water quality must be displayed.

Imperative

People often seek out Blue Flag beaches because they are associated with excellent water quality. To protect the health of beachgoers, the most recent water quality results must be posted at your beach. As soon as they are available, the E. coli levels must be displayed in three places: at the beach, on a city or health unit webpage, and the individual beach page on Swim Guide (www.theswimguide.org). Swim Drink Fish staff will assist with creating the Swim Guide beach page(s).

The Blue Flag information board template includes space for posting water quality results.

Results can also be posted on a sandwich board, whiteboard or bulletin board located at lifeguard stations or other facilities. The ideal format for displaying the E.coli levels is a table or chart, along with an explanation of how the results relate to the Blue Flag criteria. Most importantly, the results should be easy to find and displayed in a way that is easy to understand.

A tip is to use red and green emoticons or a red and green flag system to represent water quality advisories. Swim Drink Fish staff can provide further guidance on this, if needed.

4 Information about the local ecosystem must be displayed.

Imperative

The community must offer at least five environmental education initiatives during the Blue Flag season. Several of the initiatives should be provided at the beach and have a direct focus on the coastal and aquatic environment. The beach must promote all five of the educational initiatives. We suggest advertising the upcoming activities on the beach Information Board, on posters, at an information centre, park offices, bulletin boards, whiteboards or nearby restaurant and cafe boards. Swim Drink Fish will check the status of the educational initiatives during annual control visits.

Topics can include:

- **Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)**
- **Species at Risk (SAR)**
- **Important Bird Areas (IBAs)**



- Unique features like coastal dunes
- The function of riparian (shoreline) habitat
- Wetlands and their role in watersheds
- Local fish populations

If your beach provides habitat for species at risk, you will need to include a management plan and relevant permits with your Blue Flag application.

5 A map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed.

Imperative

A map of the beach area is required so that visitors can see the boundaries of the Blue Flag zone and locate facilities and services. The Blue Flag information board template includes a space for a map of the beach, so it is important to refer to the template before designing the map to ensure that the dimensions are correct.

The map should be easy to read and orientated to the beach with a "you are here" pointer. Blue Flag provides the standard symbols and pictograms for use on the map. Standard symbols and pictograms are internationally recognized and understood in different languages. They should be used wherever possible. The map must include:

- You are here" pointers
- Lifeguards or lifesaving equipment
- The area patrolled (for beaches with lifeguards)
- First aid equipment
- Telephones Toilets (including accessible toilets)
- Drinking water
- Car and bicycle parking areas
- Authorized camping sites near the beach
- Recycling facilities
- Location of water sampling point(s)
- Access points and access for persons with disabilities
- Zoning (swimming, surfing, sailing, boating, etc.)
- Nearby public transport
- Footpaths
- Blue Flag boundaries
- Location of other information boards
- Rivers and inflows
- Local landmarks (where applicable)
- Stormwater outlets
- Nearby natural sensitive areas, etc.
- Compass rose
- Scale bar

6 A code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed.

Imperative

Sustainable beach tourism is only possible if beachgoers respect the environment. A code of conduct encourages safe and environmentally responsible behaviours and ensures that visitors understand the local rules and by-laws.

The code of conduct must include rules about the presence of domestic animals, zoning (when appropriate), fishing, litter management, the use of vehicles, camping, fires, etc.

The code of conduct must be displayed on the Blue Flag information board. It should also be posted at other locations such as entry points and areas of concern.

Laws governing beach usage and management should be available to the public at the office of the local authority/beach operator.





Water Quality

Because the Blue Flag program is international, it is important that all beaches in the program meet the same global standards. The international water quality criteria are based on the European Union's Bathing Water Directive.

The international Blue Flag criteria are considered a minimum requirement, and any country may strengthen or add criteria which uphold national or regional guidelines. Blue Flag Canada has therefore built in requirements based Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality (2012). Blue Flag beaches in Ontario must adhere to the Ontario Beach Management Protocol (2018). Blue Flag beaches in Alberta must adhere to the Safe Beach Protocol, 2019.

7 The beach must fully comply with the water quality sampling and frequency requirements.

Imperative

Blue Flag Canada Requirements

Canada's freshwater beaches are routinely sampled for E. coli and saltwater beaches are sampled for intestinal enterococci. Beaches must have multiple sample sites representing the majority of the bathing area. Beaches longer than 1,000 metres must have one sample site every 200 metres. Samples should be taken from fixed locations, including where the concentration of bathers is highest. Samples are taken 15 to 30 centimeters below the water surface cm below the water surface and must be taken on a weekly basis at minimum, on the same day of the week. They should be taken at regular times, ideally when bacterial levels are typically highest.

International Blue Flag Requirements

All Blue Flag beaches must be tested for both E. coli and intestinal enterococci at least five times per season. Samples should be spread evenly throughout the bathing season, with no more than 30 days between sample dates. One preseason sample of each indicator must be taken up to 30 days before regular water quality monitoring begins. Because most Canadian beaches are sampled regularly, additional testing is usually only required for the second indicator; freshwater beaches will require five single samples of intestinal enterococci,

whereas saltwater beaches will require five single samples of E. coli. In most cases, public health personnel can take an extra sample during regular monitoring; alternatively municipal or park staff may be trained to take samples properly. The additional samples must be sent to an independent laboratory for analysis. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all of the necessary samples are taken and analyzed.

If sample results exceed provincial or federal standards, re-sampling should take place as soon as possible to ensure that water conditions have returned to normal and the beach is safe for swimming. Waiting too long only prolongs the time that the beach is posted, discouraging the public from visiting the beach. This can negate your efforts to promote your beach to the community and tourists.

Blue Flag Canada recommends public transparency about all water quality testing results.

Blue Flag International uses the 95th percentile calculation method to assess whether the beach meets the international criteria. The 95th percentile calculation obtains the average amount of pollution. For water quality sampling results, the value shows the results that are less than or equal to the limit values 95% of the time. The standards refer to values that would be exceeded less than 5% of the time.

During the Blue Flag application phase Swim Drink Fish provides all applicants a formatted excel sheet where water quality data is entered. The results are automatically calculated in the excel sheet, indicating if the water quality results meet Blue Flag International water quality guidelines.

In the event that sample results exceed the guidelines, a sample may be excluded from the 95th percentile spreadsheet. If it is necessary to replace a discarded sample, an additional sample must be taken seven days after the end of the short-term pollution. A maximum of 15 percent of samples in a season may be discounted.

In addition to sampling for microbiological, physical-chemical parameters must be taken. This includes:

- **Water and ambient air temperature**
- **Water pH**
- **Rainfall within 24 and 48 hours**
- **Rain intensity**

- **Weather conditions (e.g. cloudy, sunny)**
- **Wind speed and direction**
- **Water clarity/turbidity**
- **Wave height**
- **Pollution sources, such as waterfowl, industrial waste discharges, storm water outflows, septic system discharges, algal blooms and agricultural run-off**
- **Other environmental factors that may be locally significant**

In case of an oil spill, algal bloom, abnormal weather or other extreme factors which can have a serious adverse effect on water quality, the beach manager must temporarily take down the flag and clearly state the reason on the information board.

It is recommended that the wording of this information is along the lines: “This beach has recently experienced abnormal weather. Swimming is not recommended at this time due to the possibility of pollution.”

8 The beach must fully comply with the requirements for water quality analysis.

Imperative

A Blue Flag application must include data for at least 20 samples (each) of E.coli and intestinal enterococci, taken on separate dates. These samples can be spread over four years or taken within one bathing season, as long as there are at least five samples of each indicator per season. Four years of water sampling data including E. coli single samples and calculated geometric means, Intestinal Enterococcus samples, and other chemical-physical water tests. The data must accompany the application in an excel or csv format, or machine readable formatting (Appendix X: open data standard and HTML format).

It is necessary to establish a sampling calendar and make it available to Blue Flag Before the bathing season. This will ensure that you collect the necessary number of samples, including a pre-season sample. Sampling should take place no later than four days after the date specified in the sampling calendar.

An independent laboratory must carry out the analysis of the bathing water samples. The laboratory must be nationally or internationally accredited to carry out microbiological and physical-chemical analyses.

Once your water quality results are available, upload them to the Swim Guide website (www.theswimguide.org). Swim Drink Fish staff will set up an account for you and provide instructions for updating the website.



9 Industrial, waste-water or sewage-related discharges must not affect the beach area

Imperative

The collection, treatment and discharge of wastewater in the community must meet Canada’s Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations, established under the Fisheries Act. For more information on these regulations visit: Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations: reporting.

There should not be any discharge of industrial pollution, urban wastewater or sewage into the Blue Flag swimming zone or surrounding area.

If there are discharge points in the vicinity of the beach, these must be documented at the time of application. Any such discharges must not negatively affect the environment or compromise the water quality.

Bathing Water Profile (also known as an Environmental Health and Safety Survey)

All Blue Flag applicants must submit a bathing water profile during the application process. In Canada, a bathing water profile is known as an Environmental Health and Safety Survey (EHSS) described in the Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality. To meet this Blue Flag criteria the applicant must provide the EHSS for the beach.

An EHSS reports on potential sources of pollution, provides a description of the physical, geographical and hydrological characteristics of the bathing water, as well as conducts an assessment of the potential for cyanobacteria and algae formation. An EHSS is typically completed by the regional or city Public Health Unit during the preseason assessment period.

“An EHSS provides the foundation or “blueprint” for designing and implementing an effective risk management plan for recreational waters. It is a comprehensive search for, and assessment of, existing and potential water quality hazards (biological, chemical and physical) and their associated risks to the health and safety of the public at designated beach areas.” Page 12 of the Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality – Third Edition

10 The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for the microbiological parameter *Escherichia coli* (E.coli) and intestinal enterococci (streptococci)

Imperative

Canadian Blue Flag Requirements

In Canada, freshwater beaches are sampled for E.coli and saltwater beaches are sampled for intestinal enterococci. Sample data is analyzed using a geometric mean of multiple sample sites.

This is the number which is reported to the public, and beaches are typically “posted” if the geometric mean exceeds the provincial or federal limit value. In order to qualify for a Blue Flag, at least 80 percent of your geometric mean results must fall below the limit value. For instance, if you are at a beach in Ontario, 80 percent of your geometric mean results must be less than 200 cfu/100 mL.

International Blue Flag Requirements

To meet the international criteria, raw data from both indicators is analyzed using the 95th percentile methodology. A 95th percentile spreadsheet will be provided along with your annual Blue Flag application form. You will simply be required to enter the raw data for at least 20 samples of each indicator, and the spreadsheet will automatically calculate whether the beach complies with Blue Flag International water quality standards

Water Quality Criteria for Marine Beaches

Indicator	Blue Flag International Standards	Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality, 2012	British Columbia
Escherichia coli (Faecal Colibacteria)	Single sample concentration (minimum of one sample): < 250 E. coli / 100 mL	E. coli is considered acceptable for marine waters if there are studies to back up testing for this indicator (Section 4.1.1 page 34)	Geometric mean concentration (minimum of five samples): ≤ 200 E. coli / 100 mL Single-sample maximum concentration: ≤ 400 E. coli / 100 mL
Intestinal Enterococci (streptococci)	Single sample concentration (minimum of one sample): < 100 E. enterococci / 100 mL	Geometric mean concentration (minimum of five samples): ≤ 35 enterococci / 100 mL Single-sample maximum concentration: ≤ 70 enterococci / 100 mL	Geometric mean concentration (minimum of five samples): ≤ 35 enterococci / 100 mL Single-sample maximum concentration: ≤ 70 enterococci / 100 mL

Water Quality Criteria for Freshwater Beaches

Indicator	Blue Flag International Standards	Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality, 2012	Ontario Operational Approaches for Recreational Water Guideline, 2018	Alberta Safe Beach Protocol, 2019
Escherichia coli (Faecal Colibacteria)	Single sample concentration (minimum of one sample): < 500 E. coli / 100 mL	Geometric mean concentration (minimum of five samples): ≤ 200 E. coli / 100 mL Single-sample maximum concentration: ≤ 400 E. coli / 100 mL	Geometric mean concentration (minimum of five samples): ≤ 200 E. coli / 100 mL Single-sample maximum concentration: ≤ 400 E. coli / 100 mL	N/A
Intestinal Enterococci (streptococci)	Single sample concentration (minimum of one sample): < 100 E. enterococci / 100 mL	N/A	N/A	Rolling geometric mean concentration: < 300 cce/100mL Single statistical threshold value < 1280 cce / 100mL or; > 1280 cce and < 6400 cce / 100 mL & no evidence of human or ruminant Bacteroides species
Cyano-bacteria	N/A	20µg/L or less expressed as microcystin-LR Total number of cells: 100,000 cells/mL or less	N/A	20µg/L or less expressed as microcystin-LR Total number of cells: 100,000 cells/mL or less

11 The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for the following physical and chemical parameters.

Imperative

Water quality can also be affected by physical and chemical parameters such as oil and floatables. Bathing water must meet the following requirements:

- The water must be free of odours and oily films.
- There must not be any floatables such as tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers, glass or any other substance.

Immediate action should be taken if abnormal changes are detected. This includes changes in the colour, transparency and turbidity of the water. Should physical or chemical pollution (or algal blooms) be detected repeatedly, the Blue Flag must be taken down for the remainder of the season





Environmental Management

12 The local authority/beach operator must establish a beach management committee.

Imperative

Blue Flag is a multi-disciplinary program, promoting cooperation between various agencies and stakeholders. Collaboration is important during the application process, as input is required from various departments to complete the application form properly and provide the necessary documentation. The committee should also include representatives of community groups, clubs, nonprofits and conservation authorities.

The beach management committee helps ensure all stakeholders and agencies continue working together throughout the years to maintain the Blue Flag environmental management criteria. This includes management of Coastal and Marine Protected Area requirements, if appropriate.

The committee should meet at least twice a year to discuss the management of the beach and ensure that all criteria are being met. Committee members may also take a hands-on approach, such as providing support to the beach manager, facilitating environmental education activities and promoting the program. If there are multiple Blue Flag beaches within a community, only one committee is needed to oversee all of the sites.

13 The local authority/beach operator must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach.

Imperative

As a standard of excellence, Blue Flag requires that applicants manage the beach and facilities in compliance with provincial and national legislation.

This includes building codes, land use planning, environmental assessments, wastewater treatment, environmental management, accessibility and endangered species legislation.

14 Sensitive areas must be managed accordingly.

Imperative

Some sites at or near a Blue Flag beach may be very sensitive and require special management. In these cases, the beach operator must consult with an appropriate conservation organization or expert for advice on how to manage these sites. Where areas require special management, at the time of application, the applicant must provide confirmation that this consultation has taken place and that a management plan will be implemented.

However, the sensitivity of certain areas may prevent them from being part of a Blue Flag beach or from having information posted at the beach directing people to the area. An increased number of visitors could endanger wildlife and/or habitats, e.g. using land space for the construction of facilities, parking, paths, etc. As a general rule, Blue Flag accreditation is only given to sites that can demonstrate management of visitors and recreational use that prevents long term irreversible damage to the local natural environment.

If a Blue Flag beach is in or near a Marine Protected Area, it is necessary to consult with the MPA management in order to ensure compatible ecosystem conservation and biodiversity goals.



15 The beach must be clean.

Imperative

When people visit a Blue Flag beach, they expect it to be clean—so it is critical that your beach lives up to that standard. Depending on the size of your beach and the resources at your disposal, you may clean your beach by hand or use a mechanical groomer. Where possible, hand-picking is preferable because it has the least impact on the natural ecosystem. Large beaches however, can be difficult and time-consuming to groom by hand.

Regardless of the method you use, it is imperative that beach grooming does not interfere with nesting species such as turtles, frogs and shorebirds. Some species like the endangered fowler's toad (*Anaxyrus fowleri*) burrow under the sand, and can be harmed by mechanical grooming. If the beach is habitat for species at risk, a management plan must be in place which includes the timing and method of beach grooming. This plan must be approved by the appropriate authorities.

To determine the cleanliness level of the beach, it is recommended that a Beach Litter Measuring system, or similar system, be used. (See Appendix X for further details).

16 Seaweed or natural debris should be left on the beach.

Imperative

Only man-made litter should be removed from the beach. In fact, natural debris can play a pivotal role in the beach's ecosystem. For example: when seaweed washes ashore, it helps sand collect to build dunes, releases nutrients and provides foraging habitat for shorebirds and other wildlife. Vegetation and natural debris should therefore be left on the beach. The strand line should be hand-picked however, to remove litter that may wind up in it.

Vegetation may only be removed if it accumulates to the point where it is a hazard or creates a foul odour. It can be moved to a designated area of the beach where it may continue to provide habitat. Seaweed can also be dried and used later as fertilizer or dune stabilizer. If these options aren't possible, it should be composted.



17 Garbage bins must be available at the beach in adequate numbers and they must be regularly maintained.

Imperative

Garbage bins should be of a suitable design and appearance as well as functionality. If possible, bins should be made of environmentally friendly products like recycled plastics or wood. It is best to use bins with covers, otherwise they can attract wildlife and birds.

There must be enough bins to service the whole beach and they should all be regularly maintained, well secured, and spaced appropriately. During the peak tourist season, the spacing between bins and the frequency at which they are emptied should be increased as necessary.

In summary, when choosing and locating bins, the following factors should be considered:

- **Bin capacity**
- **Environmentally friendly products**
- **Type and source of litter**
- **Volume of pedestrian traffic**
- **Frequency of service**
- **Local environment (e.g. winds, high tides)**
- **Scavenging by wildlife and birds**
- **Accessibility (e.g. height, surface)**

18 Recycling bins must be available at the beach.

Imperative

In order to encourage people to recycle, it has to be convenient—so it is important that there are enough recycling bins to service the entire beach, and that they are easy to find. Provide separate containers for the types of waste that are recycled in your municipality, such as paper, plastic, glass and cans. These bins should be well labeled and designed to encourage people to put materials in the appropriate containers. If your local recycling facility does not require source separation, this information should be communicated on signage.



19 An adequate number of toilet or restroom facilities must be provided.

Imperative

There must be enough restrooms to service the average number of visitors during the peak season. Also take into account the length of the beach and the location of major access points. Restrooms must be easy to locate through signage, including the map on the Blue Flag information board. Restrooms must be equipped with sinks, soap and clean towels (paper or cloth) or a hand-dryer. If there is not running water, hand sanitizer must be provided. If possible, provide showers, change rooms and diaper changing stations.

For smaller beaches, it may be possible to use the restrooms in nearby shops, restaurants, cafés or other establishments so long as you have permission from the owner and have signage clearly indicating where they are located. Access to the restrooms must be safe and accessible for wheelchairs.

20 The restroom facilities must be kept clean.

Imperative

No matter how beautiful your beach is, filthy washrooms will leave people with a bad impression. It is important that your restrooms are checked and cleaned as often as necessary depending on the number of visitors on a given day.

Eco-friendly, non-toxic cleaning products and soaps should be used to protect both the environment and the health of staff and visitors. If paper towels are used, they should be made of post-consumer recycled paper.

21 The toilet or restroom facilities must have controlled sewage disposal.

Imperative

In communities with sewage treatment facilities, the toilets must be connected to the municipal sewer to ensure that sewage is treated properly.

If your washrooms are connected to a septic system, it is important that the system is well maintained and does not leak into the groundwater.

22 Camping, driving and dumping are prohibited on the beach.

Imperative

To protect the beach ecosystem and keep it clean, ensure that camping, driving and dumping are prohibited. There must be adequate signage to inform the public about these restrictions, including information about relevant by-laws.

Only emergency and work vehicles are permitted on a Blue Flag beach. If there are issues with unauthorized vehicles entering the beach, barriers should be put in place to prevent their access. In the case of special events that require the use of vehicles on the beach, a management plan must be developed which prevents damage to the ecosystem, as well as risks to beach users.

23 Domestic animals must be prohibited from the beach.

Imperative

With the exception of guide dogs for the visually impaired, pets are not allowed on Blue Flag beaches. They are permitted in parking areas, parks and paths adjacent to the beach, but not on the beach itself. Animals in these areas must be kept on a leash and picked up after..

If there is significant demand from dog owners, and the beach is large enough, we recommend creating a dog-friendly zone which is outside of the Blue Flag boundaries. The zones must be physically separated, and there must be adequate signage.



Signage should also ask people to pick up after their pets, and it is a good idea to provide baggies and waste bins to encourage responsible behaviour

24 All buildings and beach equipment must be properly maintained.

Imperative

The facilities at your beach must reflect a standard of excellence. Make sure that buildings and equipment are clean, safe and well maintained.

Facilities should be maintained with the smallest environmental footprint possible. This includes using eco-friendly products like low VOC paints and non-toxic cleaning products. Look for ways to conserve water by using low flow or composting toilets and motion sensor taps. You can also conserve energy by using LED light bulbs.

When designing new structures, ensure that the necessary permits are acquired. Construction should occur outside the Blue Flag season, and it is important that it doesn't disrupt sensitive ecosystems. If construction is necessary during the bathing season, it must be done without disrupting visitors or interfering with the ability of the beach to meet the Blue Flag criteria.

25 Marine and freshwater sensitive habitats in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored.

Imperative

If there is a sensitive habitat (such as coral reef or seagrass beds) located within 500 metres from any part of a Blue Flag beach, a monitoring program must be established to monitor the health of the habitat at least once a season.

An expert organization or relevant authority must be consulted regarding the monitoring and management of this sensitive area.

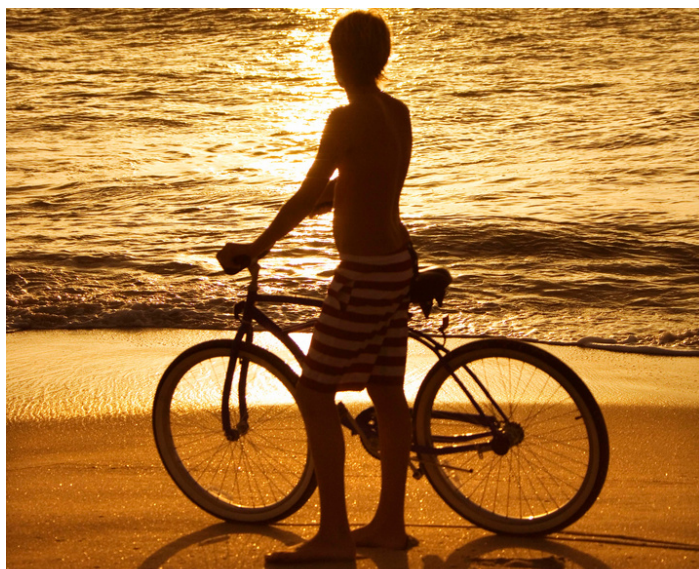
26 A sustainable means of transportation should be promoted in the beach area.

Guideline

Transportation can have a big impact on the environment, from affecting local air quality to increasing greenhouse gas emissions. A truly sustainable beach should be accessible by cycling, walking or public transit.

There are several ways that you can encourage sustainable transportation:

- **Provide and encourage public transportation like trains, buses and streetcars**
- **Offer shuttle buses to and from the beach**
- **Provide cycling and pedestrian trails to the beach**
- **Provide cycling infrastructure like trails, bike racks and bike rentals or loans**
- **Ensure that there are adequate sidewalks to encourage walking**





Safety and Services

27 Appropriate public safety control measures must be implemented.

Imperative

Every beach has different physical characteristics and risks. To make your beach as safe as possible, the first step is to have an aquatic safety audit done. Contact the Lifesaving Society (www.lifesavingsociety.com), a registered charity dedicated to drowning prevention. A representative can evaluate your beach, taking into account factors like the size of the beach, the number of visitors and the risks present. The audit will list recommendations on the safety measures that should be taken and will clarify whether you need lifesaving equipment or lifeguards. To be awarded a Blue Flag, you will be required to follow the recommendations of the audit.

Beaches with Lifesaving Equipment Only

Lifesaving equipment consists of a reaching pole, ring buoy and rope mounted on a stand that is clearly identified as a lifesaving station. Equipment should be accompanied with instructions on how to use and what to do in the event of a rescue.

Lifesaving stations must be located every 100 metres and positioned so they can be reached from any point on the beach. Because theft or vandalism of equipment can happen, it is important to install signage that warns of the consequences of tampering with equipment.

Equipment should be inspected regularly and replaced when necessary. It is a good idea to have an inspection schedule, at least once per week.

It is not necessary to leave lifesaving equipment out 24 hours per day, as long as signage indicates the times when it is available. If theft is a concern, equipment may be taken into storage at night, so long as it is put back in place during regular hours.

In addition to life saving stations, an emergency phone must be located within close proximity to the beach.

Beaches with Lifeguards

Where lifeguards are required, there must be at least two on duty at all times. Lifeguard stations should be spaced 200 metres apart or less, depending on visibility and numbers of people. It may be necessary to increase the number of lifeguards during peak usage, for example on weekends and holidays.

Lifeguards must have their up-to-date National Lifesaving Society (NLS) certification.

Lifeguards must also be easily recognizable, wearing a standard uniform. Each lifeguard station must be equipped with first aid and lifesaving equipment according to regulations.

The lifeguarded area should be clearly marked out, either with buoys or flags. If flags are used, the system should be clearly explained in a way that can be understood universally. The lifeguarded area must be defined on the map of the beach, with information about when lifeguards are on duty.

NOTE: The provision of lifesaving personnel/equipment at a beach should be seen as only one element of an overall strategy that includes information and education aimed at preventing accidents from happening in the first place.



28 First aid equipment must be available on the beach.

Imperative

First aid may be available by means of any or all of the following:

- 1. A lifeguard on site**
- 2. An attended first aid station with trained personnel**
- 3. Equipment located in a shop or other beach facilities at the beach**
- 4. First aid kit on the beach**

It is strongly recommended that busy beaches and family beaches have first aid stations with staff in attendance. First aid personnel must have appropriate qualifications. Unattended first aid stations should have standard supplies, including bandages, gloves, disinfectant, plasters, etc.

Attended first aid stations should also have:

- **Cold and hot water**
- **First aid bed**
- **Oxygen cylinder and mask**
- **Immobilizing trauma board**

First aid stations should be clearly posted so that they are easy to locate by visitors. Their location and times of availability should also be included on the Blue Flag information board.



29 Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place.

Imperative

Preparedness can make all the difference during an emergency or a natural disaster. An emergency in this context would be defined as an event which has a large scale impact on the beach or bathing water. Your emergency plan therefore has to take into account temporary pollution risks such as oil spills, toxic waste spills, toxic algal blooms and sewage discharge due to flooding and extreme weather.

An emergency preparedness plan will provide elected officials, personnel and emergency response agencies with guidelines on how to respond during an emergency or natural disaster and who is responsible for what. This will help ensure that the situation is dealt with efficiently.

The emergency plan should include the following:

- 1. List of people to contact and their responsibilities**
- 2. Evacuation procedure if necessary**
- 3. Communications procedure to warn the public**
- 4. Communication to Blue Flag Canada and withdrawal of Blue Flag**

The public must be informed immediately of any pollution incidents that make the water unsafe for swimming. Information should be posted at the beach, at all access points, and by way of media releases and on the municipal website.

The beach should be closed and the Blue Flag taken down until the incident has passed.

30 There must be management of different users and uses of the beach so as to prevent conflicts and accidents.

Imperative

Blue Flag encourages healthy outdoor activities—sports like paddleboarding, kiteboarding, surfing and kayaking get people outside connecting with nature. If your beach does support multiple uses, it is important for these activities to be zoned in order to prevent accidents. A designated swimming area must be marked with standardized swimming buoys. Recreational zones must be shown on the map of the beach.

Motor craft should operate at least 100-200 metres away from the swimming area. Furthermore, patrons who operate powered craft should be provided with guidelines for the use of their craft and the location of different zones.

If the beach is guarded, lifeguards must enforce the zoning of the different recreational areas in the water. Different activities on the beach must also be clearly marked and zoned.

Consideration should also be given to potential noise impacts from some activities (motorized activities, stereos and kites). If special events are to be held on the beach then these should be located outside of the main swimming areas or after swimming hours.

Sensitive habitat must be protected from human traffic. If an event prevents the beach from upholding the Blue Flag criteria, the flag must be withdrawn for the duration of the event.

When such an event takes place, users of the beach should be notified through public warnings at the beach and preferably in the local media prior to the event.

31 There must be safety measures in place to protect users of the beach.

Imperative

Access to the beach must be safe. Beaches that are physically challenging must have facilities for safe access, e.g. secured steps with handrails. Similarly, there should be designated pedestrian crossings on busy roads in the vicinity of the beach.

Beach promenades and steps onto the beach must be complete and in good condition. The parking lot should be well maintained. Wheelchair accessible parking must be available and clearly marked. Other access paths must also be safe, with regulations for cars and bicycles. Bicycle paths should be encouraged whenever relevant.

Where promenade edges are higher than 2 metres above the beach, warning signs and/or a barrier must be in place to prevent accidents. This is especially important where the beach surface is rocky.

The public must have access to Blue Flag beaches without being a client of a certain hotel or beach club. Access to the beach should preferably be free, although at some beaches public access is provided through charging a small and reasonable fee.

32 A supply of drinking water should be available at the beach.

Guideline

There should be a safe, potable water source at the beach. Not only is this important for public health, but it will prevent the number of water bottles that people buy and discard.



33 At least one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and facilities provided for people with disabilities.

Imperative

Accessibility is an important feature of a Blue Flag beach, so it is important that your beach has accessible parking, pathways and facilities. Wheelchairs should at least be able to get to the beach, but access to the water is encouraged. This can be facilitated by ramps, wheelchair mats, and other accessible pathways. It is recommended that the ramp design and material fit the natural environment and wherever possible, environmentally friendly materials should be used.

The beach and facilities must comply with provincial and national regulations regarding access and facilities for people with disabilities. In addition, parking areas should have reserved spaces for accessible parking.

Appendix A: Sample Application Form

Application form for Blue Flag beach 2020



INFORMATION ABOUT THE MUNICIPALITY/COMMUNITY:

Name of the municipality: _____

Address: _____

Region: _____

Community: _____

Telephone number: _____

Fax number: _____

E-mail and website: _____

Name and function of contact person: _____

Name and function of contact person during holidays: _____

No. of permanent inhabitants in the community/municipality: _____

No. of inhabitants in the community/municipality during the peak season: _____

How many beaches are there in the community/municipality? _____

How many beaches in the community/municipality are applying for the Blue Flag? _____

INFORMATION ABOUT THE APPLYING BLUE FLAG BEACH:

a. Beach name: _____

b. Registration or nuts number: _____

c. GPS coordinates of the beach (one point, central to the beach) in Decimal Degrees: _____

d. Name of beach operator responsible for the beach management: _____

e. Address: _____

f. Telephone number: _____

g. Fax number: _____

h. E-mail and website: _____

i. Name of contact person during holidays: _____

j. Estimated maximum number of visitors per day: _____

k. Estimated average number of visitors per day: _____



Appendix B: Beach Litter Measuring System – a method of mapping the status of litter on a beach [Criterion 15]

In order to determine the cleanliness on the beach, the Beach Litter Measuring System could be used by the beach manager or the National Operator when conducting beach monitoring visits.

The system differentiates between bulky litter (>10 cm) and fine litter (<10 cm). It takes a closer look at the amount of litter in defined representative areas on the beach. According to the amount of litter, beaches are classified into different cleanliness levels (A+ to D). The method combines taking pictures and making counts.

At a Blue Flag Beach, the cleanliness level should be A+ or A.

Step by step guidance on how to define your beach’s cleanliness level:

Bulky Litter

1. Define an area of 100 m² (10 m x 10 m) for your bulky litter count and take a photo (Choose the dirtiest 100 m² that you can find on the beach).
2. Count the units of bulky litter (>10 cm) within the area.
3. Take a picture of the area (to keep as proof),
4. Determine the cleanliness level with help of the beach litter indicator (see below)

Fine Litter

1. Define an area of 1 m² for your fine litter count and take a photo (choose the dirtiest area within the 1 m²)
2. Count units of fine litter (<10 cm) within the area
3. Take a picture of the area (to keep as proof)
4. Determine the cleanliness level with help of the beach litter indicator (see below)

Beach Litter Indicator	
Number of litter units per area	Cleanliness level
0	A+ Very Clean
1 - 3	A Clean
4 - 10	B Moderately Clean
11 - 25	C Dirty
> 25	D Very Dirty



General

1. Keep a record of your measurements (date, time, location, circumstances, weather conditions, cleanliness level(s) for bulky litter, cleanliness level(s) for fine litter, other comments).
2. Repeat these steps at different locations along the beach if possible.
3. Repeat the measurement at different times during a season and different times of the day if possible.

It is important to keep in mind that starting to use this system might require more time in the beginning.

Once you get some exercise or training, it will be a quick, easy and helpful tool. For a more detailed version of the beach litter indicator or a description of the system, please visit the Blue Flag website or contact the Blue Flag International Head Office.

1 The Beach Litter Measuring System was developed by the Keep Holland Tidy Foundation and the Royal Dutch Touring Club.



When the Blue Flag is raised at a beach or marina, it is a celebration of a community's commitment to meet the strict Blue Flag standards, protecting our coastal ecosystems and helping foster a culture of environmental stewardship. When tourists and residents see a Blue Flag, they know a beach or marina is meeting the same high standards as any other Blue Flag beach or marina around the world.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT THE BLUE FLAG
PROGRAM AND HOW TO
APPLY FOR THE AWARD:**

**WEBSITE: BLUEFLAG.CA
EMAIL: INFO@BLUEFLAG.CA
PHONE: 416-861-1237**



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