

Criteria for Beaches



**BLUE FLAG
CANADA**
blueflag.ca



environmental
defence

Canadian operator
of Blue Flag



The Blue Flag is an internationally recognized and respected eco-label that is awarded annually to beaches and marinas that meet strict criteria. 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 more than 4,000 Blue Flags flying in 48 countries.

Canada's National Operator of the Blue Flag program is Environmental Defence, a national environmental charity. In 2014, Blue Flags were awarded to 24 beaches and four marinas across the country.

What makes the Blue Flag program so unique and successful is its holistic nature. The standards were developed to ensure that Blue Flag beaches are not only clean and environmentally sustainable, but provide the facilities and services that tourists around the world look for. It is for this reason that the Blue Flag program is embraced by the World Health Organization, the World Tourism Organization, and the United Nations Environmental Programme.

The Blue Flag 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. Imperative criteria must be complied with in order for a beach to be awarded a Blue Flag. Guideline criteria are strongly encouraged, but are not mandatory.

A beach may be eligible for Blue Flag accreditation if it is a designated swimming area, is open to the general public and has the necessary facilities and services to comply with the Blue Flag criteria. Before applying for the Blue Flag award, a beach must undergo a feasibility study. Blue Flag Canada will assess the beach and facilities, and provide recommendations for how conditions can be improved. These recommendations must be agreed upon by the beach operator, and the beach becomes a Blue Flag Candidate. Once all of the criteria have been met, the beach is eligible to apply for Blue Flag accreditation.

Applications are assessed each February by a national jury, made up of independent experts in the different categories of criteria. Successful applications are forwarded to the international jury. This process ensures that beaches continue to meet the same high standards from year to year. Blue Flag Canada also performs control visits during the beach season in order to make certain that all criteria are being met. This is critical to ensure that all awarded beaches uphold the integrity of the program.

Blue Flag Criteria for Beaches



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

- 1 Information about the Blue Flag program must be displayed. (pg. 4)
- 2 Environmental education initiatives must be offered and promoted to beach users. (pg. 5)
- 3 Information about recreational water quality must be displayed. (pg. 5)
- 4 Information relating to the local ecosystem must be displayed. (pg. 6)
- 5 A map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed. (pg. 6)
- 6 A code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed. (pg. 6)



WATER QUALITY

- 7 The beach must fully comply with the water quality sampling and frequency requirements. (pg. 7)
- 8 The beach must fully comply with the standards and 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 requirements for the microbiological parameter *Escherichia coli* (*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. 9)



ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

- 12 The local authority/beach operator must establish a beach management committee. (pg. 10)
- 13 The local authority/beach operator must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach. (pg. 10)
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SAFETY AND SERVICES

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- 28 First aid equipment must be available on the beach. (pg. 16)
- 29 Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place. (pg. 16)
- 30 There must be management of different users and uses of the beach so as to prevent conflicts and accidents. (pg. 17)
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ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND 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 bathing 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 is also used to describe the local ecosystem, advertise upcoming environmental education activities and post the latest water quality results.

You want your information board to be seen, so it is a good idea to situate it at a point of entry or another high-traffic location. For long beaches, there should be an information board in place at least every 500 metres.

Blue Flag Canada has a Blue Flag information board template which can be adapted to incorporate local information. This template saves Blue Flag communities from designing an in-

formation board from scratch, and ensures that 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 bathing 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 Explanation of the four categories of the Blue Flag criteria
- 11 Length of the bathing season at your beach
- 12 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. At least some of the initiatives should be provided at the beach and have a direct focus on the coastal environment. These initiatives must be promoted at the beach.

It is not necessary for the applicant to organize all of the environmental education initiatives. Blue Flag Canada encourages partnerships with local organizations, such as “Friends of” groups, environmental NGOs, conservation authorities, naturalist clubs or other community groups. Environmental education can also be incorporated into community events, by setting up a Blue Flag information table and talking to the public about the program and relevant environmental issues.

Environmental education initiatives can take many forms, and can be divided 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.

Blue Flag Canada encourages partnerships with local organizations, such as “Friends of” groups, environmental NGOs, conservation authorities, naturalist clubs or other community groups.

- 3 Training activities: Training sessions for teachers, municipal staff, lifeguards, cleaners, summers 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: It is strongly recommended that Blue Flag beaches have an Environmental Education Centre where specific information about Blue Flag and environmental issues can be provided. A common 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, so it is important that the public can easily find the most recent water quality results at your beach. E.coli results must be posted once they are available, both at the beach and on your individual web page on blueflag.ca.

The Blue Flag information board template includes a spot 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 readings is a table or chart, accompanied by an explanation for 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.

4 Information relating to the local ecosystem must be displayed.

Imperative

Beaches are not sterile sand boxes—they are living ecosystems that support coastal species. Every beach is unique, so your Blue Flag information board must include information about the natural features that characterize your beach and surrounding area. Information can also be displayed at tourist destinations, tourism offices and visitor centres.

Topics can include:

- Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs)

- Species at Risk (SAR)
- Important Bird Areas (IBAs)
- Unique features like coastal dunes
- Function of riparian (shoreline) habitat
- Wetlands and their role in watersheds
- Local fish populations

If your beach is 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 is required so that visitors can see the boundaries of the Blue Flag zone and locate facilities and services. The map should be easy to read and orientated to the beach with a “you are here” pointer. Standard symbols are to be used, and are provided by Blue Flag. 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 in order to ensure that the dimensions are correct.

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
- Authorised camping sites near the beach
- Recycling facilities
- Location of water sampling point(s)
- Access points and access for disabled persons
- 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 be displayed on the Blue Flag information board, and can be posted at other locations such as entrance points and areas of concern. Standard Blue Flag symbols should be used wherever possible because they are internationally recognized and can be understood in different languages.



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 on the Canadian Recreational Water Quality Guidelines. Blue Flag beaches in Ontario must adhere to the Ontario Beach Management Protocol.

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

Imperative

Canadian Blue Flag Requirements

Freshwater beaches are sampled for E.coli and saltwater beaches are sampled for intestinal enterococci. Beaches must have at least five 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 30 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 highest.

International Blue Flag Requirements

Beaches must be tested for 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 pre-season sample of each indicator must be taken within 30 days before regular water quality monitoring begins.

Because most Canadian beaches are sampled regularly, additional testing is only required for the second indicator. Freshwater beaches will require five samples of intestinal enterococci, whereas saltwater beaches will require five 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, it is recommended to re-sample as soon as possible in order to ensure that 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.

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



In case of an oil spill, 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 water quality sampling and frequency requirements.

Imperative

A Blue Flag application must include data from 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 geometric mean data must also accompany the application.

Before your bathing season begins, establish a sampling calendar and make it available to Blue Flag. 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 Blue Flag website, blueflag.ca.

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9 No industrial, wastewater or sewage-related discharges should affect the beach area.

Imperative

The collection, treatment and discharge of wastewater in the community must meet Ontario's *Environmental Protection Act* as well as Canada's Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations, established under the *Fisheries Act*.

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 nega-

tively affect the environment or compromise the water quality.

A profile of the Blue Flag bathing area should be provided with the Blue Flag application, including information about potential sources of pollution, a description of the physical, geographical and hydrological characteristics of the bathing water, as well as assessment of the potential for cyanobacteria and algae formation. This information is collected by Public Health during routine public beach surveillance.

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

Water Quality Criteria for Freshwater Beaches

Indicator	International	Canada	Ontario
E.coli	250	200	100
Intestinal enterococci	100	N/A	N/A

Water Quality Criteria for Coastal Beaches

Indicator	International	Canada	Ontario
E.coli	500	N/A	N/A
Intestinal enterococci	200	35	N/A

Canadian Blue Flag Requirements

In Canada freshwater beaches are sampled for E.coli and water quality is analyzed using a geometric mean of multiple sample sites. This is the

number which is reported to the public, and beaches are "posted" if samples exceed the limit value. The limit value in Ontario is 100 cfu/100 ml. **In order to qualify for a Blue Flag, at least 80 per cent of your geometric mean results must meet the limit value for E.coli.**

International Blue Flag Requirements

Raw data is analyzed using the 95th percentile methodology. Using the spreadsheet provided by Blue Flag, enter the raw data for E.coli and enterococci for each of the four years up to and including the most recent bathing season. If you are new to the program and only have one or two years of streptococci data, you need 20 samples entered in the appropriate years. The spreadsheet automatically calculates whether your water quality is in compliance with the above limit values.

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 and chemical pollution be detected repeatedly, the Blue Flag must be taken down for the remainder of the season and the beach will not be eligible for the Blue Flag the following year, unless the applicant fulfils the conditions for applying as a dispensation case.



ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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

Imperative

Blue Flag is a multi-disciplinary program, often requiring cooperation between various agencies and stakeholders. This collaboration is most evident during the application process, as input is required from various departments to complete all of the questions and provide the necessary documentation. The beach management committee is a means of ensuring that these personnel continue working together throughout the years to maintain Blue Flag standards. The committee should also include representatives of community groups, clubs, non-profits and conservation authorities.

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 and accessibility.

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 is strongly encouraged to consult 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 impossible to groom by hand and often require a mechanical sieve to remove small particles like cigarette butts.

Regardless of the method you use, it is imperative that beach grooming does not interfere with nesting species such as turtles, frogs and

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shorebirds. Some species like the Fowler's Toad (endangered) burrow under the sand, and can be destroyed 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.

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

Restrooms must be equipped with sinks, soap and clean towels (paper or cloth) or a hand-dryer.

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 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

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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 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, it is permissible to create 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

Facilities should be maintained with the smallest environmental footprint possible.

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 (such as coral reefs or sea grass beds) in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored.

Imperative

If there is a sensitive habitat (such as coral reefs or sea grass 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 organisation 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 has 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
- Shuttle buses to and from the beach
- Provide cycling and pedestrian trails to the beach
- Cycling infrastructure and facilities including trails, bike racks and bike rentals/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, 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 im-

portant 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 lifesaving 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.

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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:

- a** A lifeguard on site
- b** An attended first aid station with trained personnel
- c** Equipment located in a shop or other beach facilities at the beach
- d** 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 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 the physically disabled.

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.

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. For beachgoers, the Blue Flag is a symbol of excellence. 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: 416-323-9521 ext.238

Blue Flag is a highly respected and recognized international eco-label. Blue Flags are awarded to beaches and marinas that meet strict criteria for Water Quality, Environmental Education, Environmental Management, and Safety & Services.



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