

BWTF Program Overview

The Blue Water Task Force (BWTF) is the Surfrider Foundation's volunteer water testing, education and advocacy program.

Since the program's inception over 20 years ago, BWTF volunteers have been out in their communities testing the water quality at their beaches; in many cases, even before state and local government water quality monitoring programs were established. As the coverage of government-run beach programs increased with the passage of the federal BEACH Act in 2000, Surfrider chapters began designing their BWTF programs to fill in data gaps and compliment the agency programs. To do this, many chapters test beaches that are not covered by state beach monitoring programs. Most chapter water testing programs also extend year-round, during the "off" season, when lifeguards leave the beaches and health officials stop collecting water samples, but surfers continue to surf and be exposed to potential pollution events.

BWTF labs measure [bacteria](#) levels at ocean and bay beaches and freshwater, upland sites and compare them to [national water quality standards](#) established by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to protect public health in recreational waters. BWTF data is posted on Surfrider's [website](#) and shared through chapter websites and social media platforms.

The BWTF is a very diverse program. Each Surfrider chapter is able to design and implement their water testing program

to best utilize their available resources and meet local needs. Some chapters collect water samples at local beaches and run their own water testing labs. Other chapters partner with coastal organizations, universities, aquariums or other watershed groups. Some provide manpower to local beach monitoring programs by collecting water samples and delivering them to state or county-run labs. Many chapters also have water-testing programs established in local schools, and are educating students about local water quality issues and promoting a coastal stewardship ethic.

In addition to improving the public's knowledge of local water quality conditions, BWTF volunteers often become advocates for the beaches and watersheds they monitor and will present their data to local decision makers when water quality issues are discovered. Many Surfrider chapters have been quite successful at integrating their BWTF citizen science program into local management efforts aimed at solving beach pollution problems.

Surfrider's diverse membership is motivated by their common love for the ocean and a strong desire to protect our beaches for everyone's enjoyment. The BWTF provides a vehicle for volunteers to participate in science and to motivate coastal communities to take action to clean up our watersheds and improve the water quality at our beaches.

