

A huge majority of England's bathing waters continue to meet rigorous quality standards, new figures from Defra reveal. Nearly 80% of England's bathing waters met the tightest guideline standard with close to 98% meeting the European Commission's minimum water quality threshold in 2011. 414 coastal and freshwater bathing water sites were monitored across England in 2011. Results show that improvements have been maintained over the past decade:

	2000	2010	2011
Number	404	413	414
Per cent Meeting mandatory standards	94.3	97.6	97.8
Meeting EC Guideline standards	216	354	365
Per cent Meeting UK Guideline standards	53.3	85.7	88.2
Number	180	300	328
Per cent	44.4	72.6	79.2

Any bathing water site that falls below mandatory standards is investigated by the Environment Agency, who will take appropriate measures to address sources of pollution. Measures taken to reduce and mitigate pollution from agricultural sources include the Catchment Sensitive Farming project and the establishment of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones, which cover approximately two-thirds of England. During the past two decades the water industry has invested £2 billion to improve bathing water quality and further spending of £220 million is planned between now and 2015. During the 2011 bathing season there have been trials at 47 beaches in England into giving bathers information about discharges from Combined Sewer Overflows. This has been voluntary action on the part of water companies, local authorities and Surfers Against Sewage. This initiative has the support of the Cleaner Seas Forum, a Ministerial led initiative bringing together industry and environmental groups to look at how bathers can be kept better informed about water quality.