

STAYCATION - say, what?



The word “staycation” is one of the latest additions to the English vocabulary. I had never heard it until I read an international newspaper this past week. The word is a combination of the words 'stay' and 'vacation' to describe the growing trend of holidaying locally or at home.

According to the *International Express* newspaper (1 June 2010) and in which they featured a double-page spread of the launch of Blue Flag beaches in Britain, “more families than ever are expecting to swap holidays overseas for those at home,

put off by the poor economic situation, unfavourable currency fluctuations, airline strikes, and not to mention the volcanic ash”. Research has shown that over the past 12 months there has been an 18% increase in people holidaying locally in Britain. South Africa is probably experiencing the same trends influenced by the same global factors most especially economic ones.

This should be good news to Minister of Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk who recently launched a draft national tourism strategy, a plan to grow *domestic* tourism in South Africa and to encourage “South Africa’s middle income earners, to become tourists in their own county” (*The Mercury* newspaper). As Minister van Schalkwyk said, “we must find ways of unlocking growth in the domestic market”. The public is invited to comment on the draft strategy through the website of the Department of Tourism.

Both the launch of the tourism strategy and feedback on the “staycation” research, is good news for municipalities implementing the Blue Flag programme as it is likely that the assurances that accredited Blue Flag beaches bring, will prove a drawcard for these increased numbers of local visitors. We are already seeing holidaygoers “voting with their feet” and choosing South African destinations that offer world-class Blue Flag beaches.

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PLASTICS ON THE BEACH - What fun!

Angus Whitty has started an initiative to raise awareness and encourage action to remove plastic pollution from our beaches. With a message in mind, create a sculpture from plastic waste collected on our beaches. Take a photo and upload it onto www.plasticbeaches.com And then of course, remove the plastic from the beach and recycle it. Here are some of his examples.....



Title: AGM



Mixit



Oi

All Blue Flag beaches have to implement 5 different environmental education activities each season. This fun and informative process could form part of the education activities at a beach. Perhaps after a big clean-up such as the international Coastal Clean-Up day (see below), whatever plastic waste has been collected, could be used to support this activity? It will probably be fun for adults too!!! Or a school holiday activity.

Cape St Francis Blue Flag Workshop



In Africa rain is seen as a blessing and the substantial rain that fell during the Blue Flag workshop (21- 23 April) certainly brought some relief to the parched eastern Cape. The rain, however, had no impact on the warmth and high spirits of the participants at the workshop.

All representatives from coastal municipalities expressed concern about the new coastal legislation most especially with regard to the practicalities of implementing the new laws.

Already being experienced in many municipalities around the country is the lack of capacity of provincial environmental departments and the lengthy delays in getting responses from these authorities in terms of activities on our Blue Flag beaches and whether they require a full EIA or not.

Changes to Blue Flag water quality standards

At the International Blue Flag meeting that took place in Brazil in late 2009, the Blue Flag programme adopted some **significant changes** to the water quality criteria for the global programme. Many of the changes have been informed by changes coming through **water quality research** as well as developments within the **European Union** and **WHO** with respect to acceptable standards for bathing water.



The standards are now **more strict** than previously where up to 25% of samples were discarded if they exceeded the acceptable levels of indicator bacteria.

In terms of health risk, indicator bacteria limit values are now:-
 100cfu/100ml water for faecal enterococcus
 250cfu/100ml for E.coli.

While the slight increase in the accepted levels of these indicator bacteria is welcomed, compliance at a 95th percentile level puts **pressure** on coastal municipalities to ensure that the water quality is maintained at a **consistently** acceptable level as **all** samples taken are now included in assessment. Just one exceptionally high reading per season has the potential to bring about non-compliance at the 95th percentile level.

Other changes include the need to compile a **bathing water profile** for each specific beach and to schedule water sampling according to a **predetermined schedule of monitoring**.

International World Clean-up Day 13 – 18 September 2010

South Africa's first National Clean-up Week was launched in 1999 by the Plastics Federation of South Africa, the EnviroMark and Pick 'n Pay. It is held every year in the week preceding the International Coastal Clean-up.

During this week all South Africans are urged to do something towards cleaning their local community. The focus of an individual clean-up may vary and will



depend on issues relevant to a particular community. Examples of clean-ups in the past include litter collection, the clearing of illegal dumping and competitions on a clean-up theme.

An important part of the clean-up is to include a component to ensure that the benefits of the clean-up are sustained. This may take the form of an education campaign or ensuring that local facilities for cleansing are in order. Let's mark this date in our calendars!



Well Done, Vodacom!

The Vodacom Beach Clean-Up Campaign

At the end of April, the Blue Flag 2009-10 season ended for all beaches with the exception of the Hibiscus Coast beaches in KwaZulu-Natal. During this past season, a number of Blue Flag beaches benefited from the teams

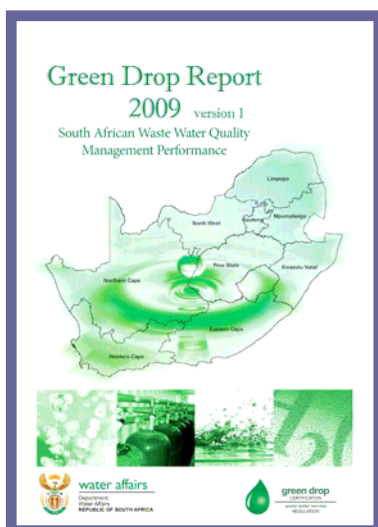
the peak holiday times. What an amazing group of people Vodacom employs for this task. The Vodacom Beach Clean-Up Campaign created jobs for 132 people and who collected just less than 30,000 bags of litter. For five years, Vodacom teams have worked in partnership with municipal teams and the highest levels

of cleanliness have been in place on these beaches. WELL DONE!

NO SURPRISES, Folks !

The contents of the recently released Green Drop Report 2009 which have widely been described as “shocking” will come as no surprise to beach managers working on our Blue Flag beaches around the coast.

Since Blue Flag put the spotlight on bathing water quality on our coast, as well as in estuaries adjacent to Blue Flag beaches, there has been growing concern about the deteriorating water quality along our coastline - and especially within estuaries.



In efforts to try to identify what is causing this, underperforming waste water systems and compromised storm-water systems within municipalities, appear to be the problem. And, as beaches are the lowest point in the system, what spills out at the coast is an excellent indicator of what is happening in the catchment area.

This Department of Water Affairs initiative to determine the performance of South Africa's waste water management systems has highlighted the huge challenges within waste water management systems around our country. Only 7% of systems were regarded as being managed with "levels of excellence". One wonders what the true picture is as not all municipalities were assessed. Only 449 of the 852 municipalities in the country were assessed because many did not "adhere to the call" for assessment, many were not "sufficiently confident" to be tested, or were unable to provide enough information. One has to ask the question: *is it acceptable that 47% of our municipalities did not participate in this assessment?*

Blue Flag fully supports the Green Drop recommendations to Water Services Authorities to address the challenges. In particular, we support:-

- Forward planning and upgrading/refurbishment of treatment plants to ensure adequate capacity for the flows received;
- The need for trained, qualified and registered staff to be in place;
- Monitoring of flow to and from the plants, and
- The sampling and monitoring of effluent quality (*and more importantly, the need for this information to be made publicly known*).

Well done to these Blue Flag municipalities on achieving the following Average Green Drop Scores:

Umhlatuze 72%
Nelson Mandela Metro 70%
Bitou 78%
Overstrand 63%
City of Cape Town 82%
Swartland 75%



In some of our other municipalities, there is still work to be done and it would be great to see ALL municipalities that fly the Blue Flag on their beaches, actively participating in the Green Drop programme. For the report go to www.polity.org.za/article/green-drop-report



IMPORTANT DEADLINES coming up

15 June	Deadline for full status applications for 2010/11 Blue Flag season
29 July	South African National Jury meeting
18 September	International Coastal Clean-Up Day
30 September	Deadline for all pilot beach applications

WORLD CUP S O C C E R

Beaches flying the Blue Flag during the World Cup Soccer:-

- Margate
- Ramsgate
- Marina
- Trafalgar (all KwaZulu-Natal)
- Humewood (Port Elizabeth)
- Dolphin (Jeffrey's Bay)
- Kelly's (Port Alfred)
- Kariega (Kenton-On-Sea)

Those beaches listed in purple would normally not be flying flags at this time of the year and are implementing an additional Blue Flag season specially to coincide with 2010 soccer.

EXCELLENCE IN ACTION



This commitment to service excellence will mean that visitors to these beaches will have lifeguards and cleaners on duty, security in place, water quality monitoring being undertaken and activities for visitors during the day even though it is the middle of the South African winter.

In light of the belief that many South Africans will make use of the longer school holidays to take a "staycation", these municipalities are to be congratulated for "going the extra mile".

Do you have any news for future issues of this Blue Flag newsletter? Please send it to blueflag@wessa.co.za and we will happily put it in future issues. **Have you visited the new Blue Flag South Africa website? Go to www.blueflag.org.za**

