

BLUE FLAG BEACH CRITERIA AND EXPLANATORY NOTES 2008-2009



INTRODUCTION

The Blue Flag Programme for beaches and marinas is run by the non-governmental, non-profit organisation "Foundation for Environmental Education" (FEE). The Blue Flag Programme was started in France in 1985. It has been operating in Europe since 1987 and in areas outside of Europe since 2001, when South Africa joined. Today, countries from around the globe are participants in the Blue Flag Programme. The Programme strives to promote sustainable development in the coastal areas through high water quality standards, safety standards, environmental management standards and environmental education. It works to bring together the tourism and environmental sectors at the local, regional and national levels. Over the years, the Blue Flag Programme has become a very well known and recognised eco-label for tourists and tour operators.

The explanatory notes given in this document are the interpretation of the Blue Flag beach criteria by FEE. In other words, the explanatory notes make up the common Blue Flag understanding of the Blue Flag beach criteria.

Most beach criteria are imperative/obligatory, which means that the beach must comply with them in order to be awarded with the Blue Flag. Other criteria are guideline criteria, which means that they should preferably be complied with but are not mandatory. Some beach criteria are only applicable to some regions of the world, and there are some slight variations between regions.

It must be emphasized that the Blue Flag beach criteria in this document are the minimum criteria. The national programmes can choose to have stricter demands or criteria than explained here.

The explanatory notes are to be used by all Blue Flag applicant beaches to understand the requirements that need to be met before they can receive the Blue Flag. It should also be used by beaches that have already received the Blue Flag, for guidance throughout the bathing season.

The explanatory notes serve not only as a guide for the beaches, but also as a guide for the National, Regional and International Blue Flag Juries when making decisions about a Blue Flag beach candidate.

In addition, the explanatory notes are a useful tool for communicating what it means to comply with the Blue Flag beach criteria in practice.

If a beach that has been awarded the Blue Flag does not, for some reason, comply with all of the Blue Flag criteria, the beach may not fly the Blue Flag. Furthermore, FEE reserves the right to refuse or withdraw the Blue Flag from any beach where the beach operator or local authorities are responsible for current violations of national environmental regulations or otherwise act in discord with the objectives and spirit of the Blue Flag Programme.

DEFINITION OF A BLUE FLAG BEACH

A beach can be eligible for the Blue Flag if it is a nationally (or internationally) officially designated bathing area with at least one sampling point for water quality analyses. The name and boundaries of the beach follow the official national recognitions. The beach must have the necessary facilities and standards to comply with the Blue Flag criteria. A responsible person in the local authority must be appointed to deal with the relations to the Blue Flag Programme. The beach must be accessible for unannounced inspection by FEE.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Each beach must have at least one information board in place containing all the required information mentioned below. For longer beaches it is recommended to install more than one information board (approximately one every 500 metres).

From 2008 common information boards, with nationally standardised information and design, must be in place at all beaches.

1. Information relating to coastal zone eco-systems and natural, sensitive areas in the coastal zone must be displayed

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that the beach users are well informed and educated about the eco-systems and sensitivities of the surrounding environment as well as valuable cultural sites/communities, and that they are motivated to learn about and experience this environment in a responsible way.

Information about the coastal zone ecosystem and natural, sensitive areas must be displayed on the beach information board. The information should include both the information about the natural sensitive area and a code of conduct for proper behaviour when visiting the area. If the full information is not available on the information board, there must at least be a short notice on the board informing the public about the nearby sensitive area and where they can find further information.

The information should furthermore be displayed publicly at tourist sites, at the sensitive areas, or in tourist information offices. The information can be in tourist brochures, tourist newspapers, or pamphlets created specifically for this purpose. In areas that are visited by a high number of tourists the information must be given in more than one way, as listed above, and it must be given in the relevant language(s).

In the case of sensitive underwater environments, specific information for divers and snorkelers about these sensitive underwater areas must be provided.

Some sites at/near the Blue Flag beach may be very sensitive and require special management. In these cases, evidence must be provided that recognized local conservation organisations have been approached for advice on how to manage them and that the problem has been addressed accordingly.

It may be that the fragility of certain areas prevents them from being part of a Blue Flag beach or from having information posted on the nearby Blue Flag beach directing people to the area. A greater number of visitors could endanger wildlife and/or habitats, i.e. using land space for the construction of facilities, parking, paths, etc. As a general rule, the Blue Flag is only awarded to sites that can demonstrate management of visitors and recreational use that prevents long-term irrevocable damage to the local natural environment.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

2. Information about bathing water quality must be displayed

Updated bathing water quality information must be displayed at the beach information board. The information could furthermore be posted at other locations, such as the major access points, at lifeguard stations, at other beach facilities, or in parking areas.

The information should be presented in a clear form that is easily understood by the general public. It should be presented as tables or figures with easily identified symbols corresponding to the results and the guideline and imperative values. This will allow all people, regardless of their native language, to understand the information.

Interpretation of the tables and figures should also always be explained in a short text. This text should state that water samples are taken every two weeks and that the flag will be removed in case of non-compliance.

The data must be updated regularly and may never be older than one month. The authorities in charge of providing the updated bathing water quality results must do so shortly after the analysis. It is the responsibility of the local authorities to ensure that the beach operator posts the information within one month after the date of analysis. The complete and detailed data must be made available by the local authorities either in the municipal office or tourist offices to anybody upon request.

The following is an example of how the information can be formatted:

Beach: _____	Local authority: _____
Contact person: _____	Telephone no: _____

Date												
Total coliform												
☹ >10.000/100 ml												
☺ 500 - 10.000/100 ml												
☺ <500/100 ml												
Faecal coliform												
☹ >2.000/100 ml												
☺ 100 – 2.000/100 ml												
☺ <100/100 ml												
Faecal streptococci												
☺ >100/100 ml												
☺ <100/100 ml												

Blue Flag and bathing water quality	What do the results mean?		
	Total coliform	Faecal coliform	Faecal streptococci
	☺ Below 500	☺ Below 100	☺ Below 100
<p>This beach is a Blue Flag beach. It means that a number of requirements regarding environmental education, water quality, environmental management, safety and services are fulfilled.</p> <p>It also means that the bathing water is continuously monitored for the three different types of bacteria shown in the tables. The bathing water is monitored at least every fortnight throughout the season.</p> <p>In the tables you can see when the water has been analysed and how many bacteria were found.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Good bathing water</i></p>		
	☹ 500-10.000	☹ 100-2.000	☹ More than 100
	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Is allowed a few times during the season</i></p>		

<p>A small number of bacteria tell you that the water is very clean - a high number of bacteria tell you that the water may be polluted and could contain bacteria from sewage. The maximum number of bacteria allowed is shown to the right.</p> <p>Blue Flag is a Programme under the Foundation for Environmental Education, FEE. It is “<i>name of national FEE member</i>” that as a member of FEE runs the Blue Flag Programme in “<i>name of country</i>”.</p>	<p>⊗ ⊗</p> <p>More More than</p> <p>than 2.000</p> <p>10.000</p> <p><i>Indicates possible pollution from sewage.</i> <i>The Blue Flag must be taken down</i></p>
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IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

3. Information about the Blue Flag Programme must be displayed

Information about the Blue Flag Programme must be displayed at the beach information board. The information could furthermore be posted at other locations, such as the major access points, at lifeguard stations, at other beach facilities, or in parking areas. Tourist information offices should also have information about the Blue Flag available, and in areas of international tourism, it should be provided in several languages.

The essence of each of the four categories of the Blue Flag criteria must be explained in this information. It is also recommended to post the entire list of beach criteria right on the Blue Flag information board. Contact information for the local, national and international offices should be posted as well. It must be posted that in the case of non-compliance, the Blue Flag will be withdrawn. If this does happen then the reason for the withdrawal must be clearly explained to the public on the information board. The length of the Blue Flag season should furthermore be posted.

The following is an example of how the information can be formatted:

<p>THE BLUE FLAG PROGRAMME</p> <p>This beach has been awarded the Blue Flag. The Blue Flag is an environmental award, given to communities that make a special effort to manage their coastal/inland water environment and beaches with respect for the local environment and nature. To attain the Blue Flag, the community and its beach operators have to fulfil a number of criteria covering water and coastal quality, environmental information and education, safety, service and facilities.</p> <p>This effort by the local community ensures that you and your family can expect to visit clean and safe environments at selected bathing sites. And it makes sure that the local community maintains a basis for sound development.</p> <p>Facts about the Blue Flag:</p> <p>The Blue Flag is awarded by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), a non-governmental environmental organisation and is represented by such national organisations in each of the participating countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Blue Flag is an environmental award for beaches and marinas • Only local authorities can apply for the Blue Flag for beaches • The criteria for Blue Flag beaches cover four main areas: a) Water quality, b) Environmental information and education, c) Environmental management, and d) Safety and services • The criteria of the Programme are developed over time, so that participating communities have to keep working on solving relevant environmental problems to get the Blue Flag
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- The Blue Flag is only awarded for one season at a time and the award is only valid as long as the criteria are fulfilled. When this is not the case, the responsible persons at the local level are obligated to take the Blue Flag down
- The national FEE organisation checks the Blue Flag sites during the season

You can help the Programme by also taking actions to protect the environment:

- Use the litterbins on the beach - and separate e.g. bottles and paper if possible
- Use public transport, walk or rent a bike to get to the beach
- Follow instructions of the local beach code of conduct
- Enjoy the nature of the beach and its surroundings, but treat it with respect
- Choose a holiday site that cares for its environment - and an environmentally friendly hotel too if possible

Local, National and International Blue Flag responsible parties:

Name and address of the local responsible person, national Blue Flag operator and the International Co-ordination must be posted.

Text to accompany the names and addresses could be the following: "These are the names and addresses of the local, national and international Blue Flag responsible parties. It will be a help to the Programme, if you tell any of these responsible bodies how well you think this area lives up to the Blue Flag standard. In this way you can help ensure that the Blue Flag standard continues to be met."

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

4. Code of conduct for the beach area must be displayed and the laws governing beach use must be easily available to the public upon request

The beach code of conduct should address the activities of the beach visitors and conduct on the beach itself. The beach code of conduct must be displayed at the beach information board. The information could furthermore be posted at other locations, e.g. at all major entrance points and near to the issue concerned (i.e. a no diving sign on the pier) in the form of signs or as posted information on the relevant sites. Internationally recognized symbols should be used wherever possible.

The code of conduct should include rules about the presence of domestic animals, zoning, using trash bins, vehicles on the beach, camping, fires, etc.

The information should also contain safety information such as the times of lifeguard duty and the area patrolled (for beaches with lifeguards), the times of first aid availability and an explanation of the emergency flag system used. Emergency phone numbers for the police, first aid, and relevant emergency number should also be present, along with the contact details for emergency services in the event of an oil or toxic chemical spill.

Laws governing beach use and management must be available to the public upon request in the municipal office.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

5. A minimum of 5 environmental education activities must be offered and displayed

Environmental education activities promote the aims of the Blue Flag Programme by:

- Increasing the awareness of and care for the aquatic environment by recreational users and inhabitants of the coastal zones

- Training personnel and providers of tourist services in environmental matters and best practice methods
- Encouraging the participation of local stakeholders in the coastal zone management
- Promoting sustainable recreation and tourism in the area
- Promoting sharing of ideas and efforts between the Blue Flag programme and other FEE programmes (YRE, LEAF, Eco-Schools and Green Key)

The planned activities for the coming season must be included in the application form, as well as information about the activities carried out during the previous Blue Flag season, if applicable.

There must be at least five distinct activities offered in the municipality or community and carried out preferably within the Blue Flag season. The activities should focus on the environment, environmental issues, Blue Flag issues or sustainability issues. At least some of the activities should be carried out at the beach and have a direct focus on the beach or coastal environment.

The education activities should be effective and relevant, and each year, the municipality should re-evaluate the activities which were held and work towards constantly improving them.

If specific sensitive environmental areas exist near a Blue Flag beach (e.g. mangroves or sea grass beds), it is strongly recommended that that 1-2 environmental activities deal with these natural sensitive areas.

Types of Activities

There must be a mix of different types of environmental educational activities offered in the municipality. The different types of activities can be divided into five categories:

Activities for Passive Participation: This could include exhibitions, films, presentations, slide shows, conferences, debates, presentations by international experts, etc.

Activities for Active Participation: This includes guided tours, educational games, theatre/plays, cleaning days, coast observation days, diving/snorkelling orientation sessions, beach inspections, photography or drawing contests, nature reconstruction projects, recycling projects, green technology projects, "adopt a beach" programmes, community coastal monitoring programmes, etc.

Reproducible Activities: This could be training for teachers, beach or marina staff, people in charge of children groups, lifeguards, cleaners, law enforcement officers, specific national training programmes, etc.

Publishing and Media: The production of leaflets, stickers, interpretive signs, postcards, school and municipal newsletters, books, T-shirts, bags, posters, radio broadcasts, etc.

Blue Flag Environmental Information Centre: It is strongly recommended that Blue Flag beaches provide an Environmental Information Centre (station, kiosk), where specific information about Blue Flag and environmental education issues can be given. Such a centre or place must offer both activities and exhibitions and provide environmental and nature information in order to qualify as an environmental interpretation or education centre. Information about its location and activities must be provided at the beach or in nearby tourist information offices. The centre should be open to and have activities and information for the general public, not only local school children.

Target groups

The activities should be addressed to a wide range of different target groups. It is important that the local authorities, together with other operators in the area, organise a programme to educate and raise awareness within the many different interest groups that influence the use of the local environment. These interest groups could be visitors, locals, tourism employees, fishermen, local industries, etc.

The types, amounts and target groups of activities should match the situation. For example, in a major tourist destination, more than one activity per season should be available to the general public.

Connection with existing programmes

The activities can be part of already existing environmental education programmes, held either on-site or in the local community (Local Agenda 21 activities, Eco-Schools activities, etc). It is also recommended that the local authority co-operates with local NGO's in setting up educational activities.

Information about Activities

Information about the publicly accessible activities must be published on the beach information board and preferably also in tourism newspapers or magazines or posted in tourism offices. The published information should include: what kind of activities, when and where are they going to take place, who they are for, etc.

Not Acceptable

Activities that are not acceptable for meeting this criterion are:

- Activities that are done to meet other Blue Flag criteria such as the general cleaning of the beach, waste management, recycling, and posted environmental information otherwise required on the information board (i.e. information on surrounding sensitive environments), etc.
- Activities focusing only on tourism without a specific focus on sustainable tourism
- Activities otherwise done by the municipality as part of the standard management of health, safety, transportation or tourism

Examples

Examples of good educational activities can be found on and downloaded from the Blue Flag International website.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

WATER QUALITY

6. Compliance with the requirements and standards for excellent bathing water quality

The bathing water quality standards for each region have been based on the most appropriate international standards and legislation.

The standards described here for recreational/bathing water quality for beaches must be adopted unless stricter national standards are already in existence. In that case, the beach must comply with the more demanding national standards for bathing water quality.

European and Moroccan beaches:

The European and Moroccan beaches currently follow the EU Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC). In 2006, a new EU Bathing Water Directive 2006/7/EC was adopted. The old Directive will be repealed and replaced by the end of 2014 at the latest. A number of countries start sampling according to the new Directive already in 2008. However, FEE has decided to keep its current reference to the EU Bathing Water Directive of 1976, until new rules have been decided upon. If a country goes by the new EU Directive and therefore omits sampling of total coliform, they may do so with a special dispensation.

Caribbean beaches:

The LBSP (Land Based Sources of Pollution) Protocol of the Cartagena Convention defines Class I Waters as waters that “due to inherent or unique environmental characteristics or fragile biological or ecological characteristics or human use, are particularly sensitive to the impacts of domestic wastewater”. Class I Waters have been identified to include different types of water, including water containing coral reefs and water used for recreation. The parameters for the water quality criterion for Caribbean Blue Flag beaches also take into consideration the significance of pollution indicators, the requirement of high amenity values, and the sustainability of monitoring programmes.

Recommendations from the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) have been followed when defining the exact bathing water quality parameters and their limit values.

South Pacific (French Polynesia) beaches:

The South Pacific beaches follow the same WHO recommended standards as in the Caribbean.

South & East African beaches and Oceania beaches:

The South & East African recreational bathing water quality standards are partly inspired by the New Zealand and South African national bathing water quality standards, but also inspired by the WHO recommended standards for the Caribbean. Regarding the monitoring of faecal enterococci in this region, it was decided that they use the standards of 100/100ml at 20% in 2008. From 2009 the following standards will be used: faecal enterococci 50/100 at 25 %).

Canadian beaches:

The Canadian Federal-Provincial Advisory Committee on Environmental and Occupation Health reviewed criteria and indicators of hygienic quality and water quality from recreational area in various parts of Canada and pertinent epidemiological studies. In 1992, their recommendations were consolidated into the *Guidelines for Canadian Recreational Water Quality*. The responsibility for monitoring recreational water quality falls to the Medical Health Officer or other appropriate authority in accordance with the statutes existing in each province. Standards across Canada all comply with the Guidelines, but the Province of Ontario has adapted more stringent guidelines for microbiological parameters (used as Blue Flag standards).

South American beaches:

The Brazilian requirements are inspired by the Brazilian Environmental Council Directive (Resolucao CONOMA 274 de Novembro de 2000). In Chile, the current Chilean Water Norm 1333 has been consulted. The national requirements for both countries were then adapted to suit Blue Flag standards after inspiration from bathing water quality standards in other areas of the World.

Microbiological parameters:

The microbiological parameters to be monitored and the quality standards for each region are given below. At any occasion that the bathing water quality falls below the limit values, it is strongly recommended that another sample is taken immediately for reference. Both the original result and the result of the extra sample need to be included in the reporting.

If the bathing water quality falls below the required limit values more often than is allowed in one season (see the accepted % test results higher than the limit values), 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 (see below).

Total coliform bacteria are only measured on European beaches and only if the country is not yet applying the new EU Bathing Water Directive. An exception for analysing the bathing water samples for total coliform at European beaches can be granted as long as the existing bathing water directive is in force and under the following conditions: a) the national authority monitoring programme officially does not include this parameter, and b) the national authorities issue a statement, stating why total coliform are not included in the analysis of bathing water in coastal zones. This exception currently is granted in Turkey.

In Brazil and in the Caribbean, the sampling of faecal streptococci (Faecal enterococci) is optional, but if sampling of faecal streptococci is imperative in national/state legislation then the parameter must be included as well. FEE expects that sampling and analysis for faecal streptococci will become imperative in the next revision of the Blue Flag beach criteria.

In Canada, the sampling of faecal enterococci is obligatory in seawater.

Parameters	Europe		South Africa and Oceania	
	Limit values	Accepted % test results higher than limit values	Limit values	Accepted % test results higher than limit values
Total Colibacteria	500/100 ml and 10000/100 ml	20 % 5%	-	-
Faecal Colibacteria (E. Coli)	100/100 ml and 2000/100 ml	20% 5%	100/100 ml	20%

Faecal Enterococci (Faecal streptococci)	100/100 ml	10 %	100/100 ml 50/100 ml (guideline until 2009, then imperative)	20% 25% (guideline until 2009, then imperative)
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Parameters	Caribbean and South Pacific		Canada	
	Limit values	Accepted % test results higher than limit values	Limit values	Accepted % test results higher than limit values
Total Colibacteria	-	-	-	-
Faecal Colibacteria (E. Coli)	100/100 ml (Geom. Mean 33.7/100 ml)	25%	100/100 ml	20%
Faecal Enterococci (Faecal streptococci)	40/100 ml (optional) (Geom. Mean 13.5/100 ml) (optional)	25%	35/100 ml (sea water: imperative fresh water: optional)	20%

Parameters	Brazil and Chile			
	Limit values	Accepted % test results higher than limit values		
Total Colibacteria	-	-		
Faecal Colibacteria (E. Coli)	100/100 ml	20%		
Faecal Enterococci (Faecal streptococci)	50/100 ml (optional)	25%		

Physical-chemical parameters:

Each region has a different set of physical-chemical parameters that must be monitored, as listed below. As for the microbiological parameters, if the bathing water quality falls below the required limit values more often than is allowed in one season (see the accepted % test results higher than the imperative/guideline values), 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 (see below).

Parameters	Europe, Chile and Brazil		South Africa and Oceania		Caribbean and South Pacific	
	Imperative Values	Accepted % test results	Imperative values	Accepted % test results	Imperative values	Accepted % test results

		higher than limit value		higher than limit value		higher than limit value
pH	6 to 9	5 %	6 to 9	5%	6.5 to 8.5	5%
Oils	<p>Water: No film visible on the surface and no odour</p> <p>Land: The beach must be monitored for such pollution, and emergency plans should cover response in case of oil pollution (see criterion 24). Municipal land-side sources must also be identified and managed.</p> <p>Accepted % test results higher than imperative value 5%</p>					
Floatables: tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers, glass, plastic, rubber or any other substances	Absence of floatables	10 %	Absence of floatables	5%	Absence of floatables	5%
Transparency/ Turbidity	Secchi depth > 1m or "No abnormal decrease" when > 1 m cannot be respected for geographical reasons	10 %	-	-	Secchi depth reading from the bottom, or from 3 meters if bottom is deeper	5%
Colour	No abnormal change	5 %	-	-	-	-
Surface active substances	< 0.3 mg/L	10 %	-	-	-	-
Phenols	No specific odour	5 %	-	-	-	-

Parameters	Canada	
	Imperative Values	Accepted % test results higher than limit value
pH	6.5 to 8.5	5 %
Oils	<p>Oil should not be present in concentrations that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - can be detected as a visible film, sheen, or discoloration on the surface - can be detected by odour - can form deposits on shorelines and bottom sediments that are detectable by sight or odour <p>Accepted % test results higher than imperative value 5%</p>	
Floatables: tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers,	Absence of floatables	5 %

glass, plastic, rubber or any other substances		
Transparency/ Turbidity	Secchi depth > 1.2 m Limit of 50 Dephelometric Turbidity Units	5 %
Colour	No abnormal change	5 %
Surface active substances	-	-
Phenols	-	-

Sampling and analysis:

A Blue Flag beach must have at least one sampling site. It is important to consider that the number and location of sampling sites must reflect the concentration of bathers along the beach as well as sources potentially affecting the water quality of the beach. The sampling point must first of all be placed where the concentration of bathers is highest.

The location of sampling sites must furthermore reflect the location of potential sources of pollution. Samples must be taken near streams, rivers or other inlets entering the beach in order to provide documentation that such inflows do not affect bathing water quality. Alternatively, the inflowing water must have been analysed at the source, documenting that it meets the Blue Flag bathing water quality criteria. Similarly, in the case of inland waters, where the water is supplemented by outside sources during dry periods, the water quality of that outside source must meet the Blue Flag bathing water quality criteria. In the Caribbean, the sampling point should coincide with a sampling point in a wider sampling programme of a regulatory body, if such a programme exists.

Samples should be taken 30 cm below water surface except for the mineral oil samples, which should be taken at surface level.

An independent person officially authorised and trained for the task must collect the samples.

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

How often a sample must be taken:

Samples for microbiological and physical–chemical parameters must at least be taken during the official bathing season. The national organisation can allow a beach to have a longer Blue Flag season than the official bathing season (on condition of compliance with all imperative criteria – including the bathing water quality criterion), but this must be clarified before the start of the season.

The first sample must be taken within 5-17 days before the beginning of the bathing season (pre-season sample).

During the bathing season, sampling must be carried out at least fortnightly. A fortnight is interpreted as less than 18 days between the samples.

Also, the gap between the pre-season sample and the first sample in the season must not be longer than a fortnight.

The earliest possible day for the last sample is a fortnight before the last day of the bathing season.

When the results of the sampling raise suspicion of an increased level of pollution, it is recommended to temporarily increase the sampling frequency in order to track the pollution incident over time and establish

whether or not the problem was temporary. Extra samples can furthermore be useful when the local authority wants to apply to get omission of a sample (see dispensation cases below).

The Blue Flag Programme does not accept candidatures where less than five samplings have been carried out in a season despite how long the official bathing season may be (e.g. in certain parts of Northern Europe where the official bathing season may be as short as 1 or 2 months).

Methods of analysis:

In the interest of increased quality and comparability of the bathing water quality data used for the evaluation of candidates for the Blue Flag, FEE finds that methods of analyses that ensure a certain trueness, reproducibility, repeatability and comparability between methods should be used. FEE intends to follow European (CEN) or International (ISO) standards in its recommendations regarding parameters and acceptable methods of analysis for them.

The “geometric mean” calculation method (used in the US) can alternatively be used instead of the standard Blue Flag method (see maximum values above).

Reporting results:

All of the water quality results must be given to the National Blue Flag Organisation as soon as they are made available. The water quality results must also accompany the new application for each bathing season. In order to be eligible for the Blue Flag, the beach must exhibit through these reports that the bathing water quality criteria were met in the previous season. If the beach has a 12 month season then the bathing water quality results should be given from 1 January to 31 December or from 1 June to 30 May.

The water quality information must also be posted on the beach information board, in accordance with criteria 2.

Request for exemption of data or considering candidate as a dispensation case:

Dispensation cases may arise when a location has had high-level readings because of a known and documented incident during the bathing season. Dispensation cases argued on the basis of incidents that can be considered unusual but not atypical of the location are not considered.

The most used request for dispensation is caused by exceptional/extreme weather conditions. A National Jury can in such cases give a dispensation to omit a sample, if the national authorities controlling bathing water quality regulation have officially approved such a dispensation. Furthermore, an official statement from national weather authorities stating that the weather was exceptional must follow the request for dispensation.

For EU-member countries the request for dispensation of omission of a sample must be approved by the European Commission (applied through the national authorities controlling bathing water quality regulation). A sample that is removed from the set of samples will thereafter not figure in the EU annual report on the bathing water quality. FEE would like to draw the attention to the fact that approvals of dispensation cases (omission of data) by the European Commission are very difficult.

If an incident of high level pollution can be attributed by way of documentation to other issues, such as an accident or another unavoidable but rectified incident, it is also possible to forward a Blue Flag candidature to the National Jury as a dispensation case. The documentation must not only show that the incident has passed but also that the pollution caused undoubtedly was linked to the incident in question. National (and EU authorities) must approve the dispensation.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

7. No industrial or sewage related discharges may affect the beach area

There must not be any injection of industrial or urban wastewater originating from a source within or outside the community affecting the water quality of the beach.

Any discharge points in the area of the beaches and in the community in general must be reported to the National Blue Flag Organisation. Local authorities must ensure, and it must be documented, that the water from any discharges in the beach area does not affect the environment.

Regarding industrial pollution, notification must be given about industrial facilities and plants in the vicinity of the presented beaches and in the community in general with information about their likely influence on the environment. Moreover, the appropriate authorities must be able to document that the area is under control for environmental impacts of nearby industrial facilities, that appropriate monitoring is carried out and that it does not pose a public health or environmental hazard.

If the beach is located where it can be potentially affected by sewage-related run-off waste or waste brought onto land from the water, and this waste does not originate from the applicant community, remedial actions must be taken. First priority should be the removal of the sources altogether. If this is not at all feasible other alternatives include: regular collection and removal of the waste that accumulates on the beach.

Storm water outlets must be clean at all times. During storm water flows, the outlets and surrounding areas must be cleaned daily. Water quality samples must be taken in line with the storm water outlet.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

8. Monitoring on the health of coral reefs located in the vicinity of the beach

If there is a coral reef located within 500 meters from any part of a Blue Flag beach, a monitoring programme must be established to monitor the health of the coral reef concerned at least once a year. Coral reefs located further than 500 meters away can be used for the monitoring, if appropriate.

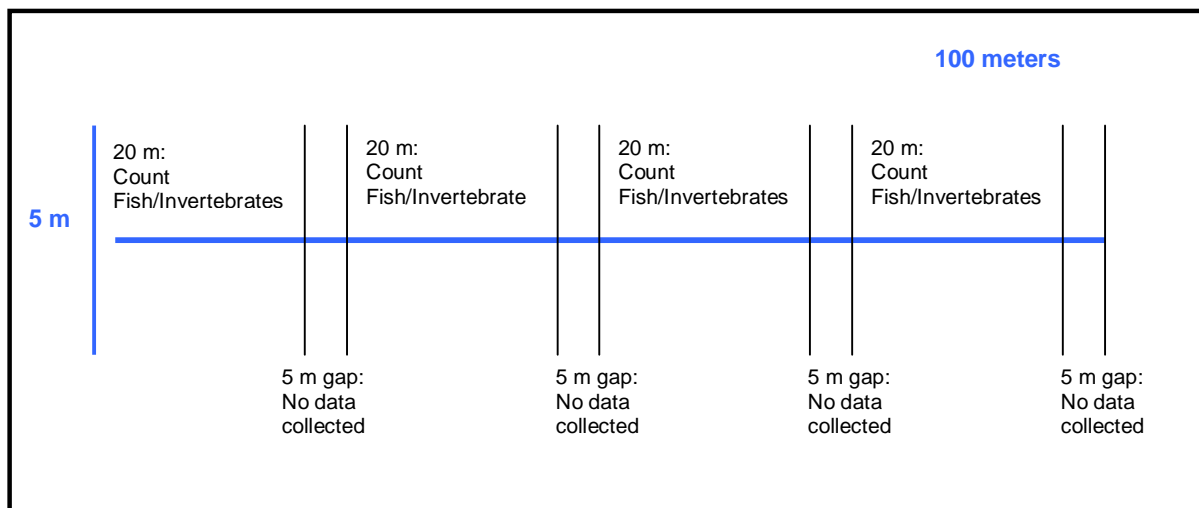
The "Reef Check" Coral Reef Monitoring Program must be used. Below is a very brief description of the content of the "Reef Check" monitoring programme. For full information about the "Reef Check" system and information about national/international support, please consult <http://www.reefcheck.org>.

"Reef Check" is designed for use by volunteer non-scientist snorkelers or scuba divers. A local "Reef Check" team should be established with a scientist and a group of snorkelers and divers trained to carry out the analyses. The team members must be skilled at identifying the indicator organisms and substrate categories. It is strongly recommended that the team attend a "Reef Check" training session. If there are already "Reef Check" teams established at the national or local level, these teams can be approached for support.

In order to carry out the monitoring, the following equipment is necessary: a copy of the instruction manual, indicator organism ID cards/books, GPS, transect lines, underwater paper and water proof pencils/markers, buoys, plumb line and safety gear.

If possible, the monitoring should take place at two depths: shallow water (2-6 meter depth) and mid-reef (6-12 meter depth). Reefs in many areas are however not suitable for monitoring at more than one depth.

A 100 meter transect should be established (preferably parallel to the shore). The transect must be divided into 4 x 20 meter observation areas divided by 4 x 5 meter gaps. For re-survey, it is important to document or permanently mark the transect start/end points.



The “Reef Check” coral reef monitoring program consists of four types of data collection methods:

- 1) Site description (environmental conditions and ratings of human impacts)
- 2) Fish counts
- 3) Invertebrate counts
- 4) Substrate type measurements

The site description includes information about: location (overall and exact location), survey time, nearby population, weather conditions, rating of human impacts on the coral reef and the possible protection of the coral reef. Use the sheet produced by “Reef Check” for the registration of the information.

The substrate survey includes the record of the substrate at points with 0.5 meter intervals along the 4m x 20m transect. The substrate must be classified in one of the following categories: hard coral, soft coral, recently killed coral, nutrient indicator algae, sponge, rock, rubble, sand, silt/clay or other substrate. In the “Reef Check” manual there is more information about how to conduct the substrate survey and classify the substrate.

The level of coral bleaching, presence of coral disease, presence of trash and coral damage must be noted.

Each region has different indicator fish and invertebrate species that should be counted along the 4m x 20m transect. In the “Reef Check” website and manual, there is more information about the fish and invertebrate species to include in the counting and information about how to conduct the counts.

Finally, it is recommended to supplement the survey with photo and/or video documentation.

The collected information must be reported to “Reef Check” on the sheets produced by “Reef Check” for this purpose.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
Caribbean, Brazil, South & East Africa		Europe, Morocco, Canada, Chile, Oceania

9. Compliance of the community with requirements for sewage treatment and effluent quality

There may not be any untreated sewage discharged from the local community. The collection, treatment and discharge of urban wastewater in the community must meet national/international standards and comply with national/international legislation.

For the countries in EU, there are requirements to the treatment and effluent quality given in the EU Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC). This Directive has requirements to the collecting systems,

level of treatment, number of samples and quality of the effluent water after treatment. The requirements depend on the size of the settlements and the area of discharge of the effluent water (into sensitive, normal or less-sensitive areas).

For the countries with the national/international legislation in force and implemented, it is necessary to follow these requirements. A number of new EU countries have been granted dispensation from the compliance with the EU Directive, while other EU member countries are in dispute with the EU Commission regarding the interpretation of the Directive.

For countries outside EU (and countries with a dispensation to the deadline of implementing the EU Directive), the national legislation on the waste water treatment must be complied with.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
	All regions	

10. Algae or other vegetation should be left to decay on the beach unless it constitutes a nuisance

Algal vegetation is generally accepted as referring to seaweed. Seaweed is a natural component of the littoral ecosystem. The coastal zone must also be considered as a living and natural environment and not only as a recreational asset to be kept tidy. Thus the management of seaweed on the beach should be sensitive to both visitor needs and littoral biodiversity. Natural disposal by tides and waves at the beach should be accepted, as long as it does not present a nuisance, which means that it should not be allowed to accumulate to the point where it becomes a hazard or distasteful to the public.

Only if it becomes absolutely necessary the algal or other vegetation should be removed, and consideration must then be given to disposing of it in an environmentally friendly way, e.g. through composting or using it as fertiliser.

In some areas seaweed is dried on the beach for later use as fertiliser or dune stabiliser. While this good practice should not be discouraged it is also necessary to ensure that it does not create a nuisance for beach goers.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

11. A beach management committee must be established to be in charge of instituting environmental management systems and conducting regular environmental audits of the beach facility

The beach management committee consists of all the relevant stakeholders at the local level. Relevant stakeholders could be a local authority representative, hotel manager, beach manager, lifeguard, educational representative, local NGOs, and other stakeholders such as native peoples, special user groups, etc.

The beach management committee co-operates with the beach operator to institute the environmental management system and to conduct regular environmental audits of the beach facility. The committee is furthermore, jointly charged with ensuring compliance with other environmental management criteria.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
Caribbean, Morocco, Brazil, Chile, South & East Africa, South Pacific, Oceania	Europe, Canada	

12. The beach must comply with all regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach (coastal zone planning and environmental legislation)

The beach location, facilities, beach operation and immediate hinterland must comply with official development plans and planning regulations. The legislation can include regulations for land-use planning, sewage/industrial waste effluent discharge, environmental health regulations, conservation plans, operations licenses and permits, etc.

In the cases that the local authority does not have or is part of a land-use plan, which addresses the use of its coastal zone or inland shores and their vicinity now and in the future, this must be produced. The public should be involved in composing and carrying out the land-use plan. The Blue Flag Programme welcomes that the applicant community carries out sustainable development projects in which public participation is a key element, e.g. Local Agenda 21 initiatives, or projects in which specific environmental actors reduce resource use or waste streams, especially those to the aquatic environment. Nature protection projects aimed at the marine or lacustrine environment are also encouraged, particularly when they involve the local community in management and care.

The location of facilities and use of the beach area and its vicinity must be subject to planning guidelines, which include environmental assessments. The applicant must assure that the facilities and activities under his/her responsibility comply with these guidelines and/or regulations. In some countries, it might be appropriate that the local planning department gives a written statement that all buildings on the Blue Flag beach meet local building regulations.

Existing beach facilities, construction and other use of the beach and its vicinity must be in compliance with laws regulating the use of the coastal zone or freshwater areas, including nature protection regulations.

The back beach area including dunes, paths, and parking areas must be properly maintained according to general coastal zone management principles for that feature.

Where applicable, the beach operator must possess and display on the beach information board the relevant beach license and other statutory permits.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

13. The beach must be clean

The beach and surrounding areas including paths, parking areas, and access to the beach must be clean and maintained at all times. No litter should be seen. Litter should not be allowed to accumulate, become unsightly or hazardous.

The beach must comply with national guidelines concerning litter. Provisions must be made for regular surveying and cleansing of the beach based on the intensity of its use. Adequate personnel and equipment must be available to clean the beach when needed.

The cleaning may be mechanical or manual, depending on the size, appearance, and fragility of the beach and its surroundings. In high use areas where it is possible, it is recommended that occasional mechanical sieving and deep cleaning of the sand be done to remove small particles such as cigarette butts, etc.

Local planners should consider the impacts, not only of the Blue Flag beaches, but also of the neighbouring beaches. Thus it is expected that all frequented community beaches will be monitored and cleaned on a regular basis.

For the management of algal and seaweed wastes, please refer to criteria 10.

When cleaning the beach, this must be done with respect to the local flora and fauna. It must be assured that areas where turtles lay their eggs are left in peace.

To determine the cleanliness level of the beach, the Beach Litter Measuring system should be used (see below):

Beach Litter Measuring System – an objective method of mapping the status of litter on a beach¹

In order to determine the cleanliness on the beach, the Beach Litter Measuring System should be used by the beach manager or the national coordinator when doing beach monitoring visits.

The system differentiates between bulky litter (>10cm) 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 how to define your beach's cleanliness level:

Bulky Litter

1. Define an area of 100m² (10m x 10m) for your bulky litter count and photo (Choose the dirtiest 100m² that you can find on the beach)
2. Count the units of bulky litter (>10cm) 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 1m² for your fine litter count and photo (choose the dirtiest area within the 100m²)
2. Count units of fine litter (<10cm) 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) bulky litter, cleanliness level(s) 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 a bit of 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, a description of the system, a training CD or for taking part in a training session, please visit the Blue Flag website or contact the Blue Flag Coordination.

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

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

14. Waste disposal bins/receptacles must be available on/by the beach in adequate numbers, regularly maintained and emptied

Litterbins (preferably with covers) should be of a suitable character and appearance. Consideration should be given to aesthetics as well as functionality. If possible, it is recommended that litterbins made of environmentally sound products are used, for example, bins made of recycled composite plastics.

There should be an adequate number of litterbins on the beach and they should all be regularly maintained, well secured, and spaced appropriately. Individual bin capacity, the number of users on the beach and how frequently the litterbins are emptied determine numbers and minimum interval between litterbins placed on the beach. The interval between litterbins and the frequency at which they are emptied should be increased as needed during the peak tourist season.

An alternative solution to having litterbins on the beach itself is to have larger receptacles placed at all major beach access points. Such an approach necessitates that beach visitors are induced to bring their litter with them when leaving the beach.

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

- Bin capacity
- Environmentally sound products
- Type and source of litter
- Selective collection of waste
- Volume of pedestrian traffic
- Servicing methods and intervals including peak times
- Local environment e.g. winds, high tides, scavenging seagulls
- Accessibility e.g. height, surface

The collected waste should only be disposed of in licensed facilities that are approved by authorities on the basis of environmental requirements. The duty of the community receiving the Blue Flag is to make sure that its waste is properly disposed of, whether it uses its own waste site or that of a neighbouring community.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

15. Facilities for receiving recyclable waste materials must be available on/by the beach

If the community has a local recycling facility then receptacles should be made available on the beach for those materials, e.g. glass, cans, plastic, paper, etc. The receptacles should be properly designed and managed for the type of waste it receives, emptied regularly, and well placed for accessibility.

The beach must be prepared to receive at least three materials for recycling. If the local recycling facility receives less than three types of waste then the beach need only accept this amount.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

16. Adequate and clean sanitary facilities with controlled sewage disposal

The number of sanitary/ablution facilities made available at the beach must reflect the average number of beach visitors during the peak season, the length of the beach and the number and location of major access points.

The presence of showers on the beach or in the toilet facilities (unless there are draught problems), changing rooms and nappy changing facilities are furthermore encouraged.

Sanitary facilities may be located in nearby shops, restaurants, cafeterias or other establishments open to the general public. There should be facilities provided for disabled visitors (see criterion 28).

The sanitary facilities must be clean at all times. The frequency of checking and cleaning the facilities must reflect the intensity of their use. Beaches with a fair number of daily visitors must have their facilities checked and cleaned every day or several times a day.

Sanitary facilities must be equipped with washbasins, soap and clean towels (paper or cloth) or a dryer. The use of environmentally sound cleaning materials, soap and towels is recommended whenever possible.

The toilets must be easy to locate through the map at the beach information board and also signs or signposts where appropriate.

Access to sanitary facilities must be safe with no hindrance or interference from vehicular traffic.

Sewage from such facilities must not enter the ground or the sea untreated. In villages, communities, or municipalities with sewage treatment, the toilet facilities must be connected to the municipal sewer. For remotely located beaches individual treatment and regularly emptied holding tanks that do not adversely affect the environment are accepted.

Consideration should also be given to the design and maintenance of the sanitary facilities. They should be well-integrated with the built and natural environment and they must be regularly kept so as to present a well-maintained appearance of the beach environment and to prevent vandalism of buildings.

In the countries with a star rating system for sanitary facilities, the facilities must have at least the second highest star rating according to the rating sheet.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

17. On the beach there will be no unauthorised camping or driving and no dumping

Unauthorised camping, driving and dumping must be prohibited on the beach. There must be information displayed about the restrictions (as part of the code of conduct, criteria 9).

Where there are no physical barriers preventing access to the beach by vehicles there should be a by-law prohibiting unauthorised driving, dumping or camping about which there should be information displayed.

The use of the beach or its nearby areas as dumps for litter and other waste is not accepted and must be controlled by the local authorities.

Preferably, vehicles (except for those used for the purpose of cleaning and safety, such as moving lifeguard equipment) should not be allowed on Blue Flag beaches in Europe. For cases where vehicles cannot be entirely prohibited, it must be adequately justified and they must be properly managed. Areas for driving and parking as well as car-free zones must be designated and there must be police or traffic guards controlling the beach on a regular basis, whenever the situation requires it. Even if cars are allowed they should preferably be prohibited in a 50 meter zone from the water's edge and up unto the beach. In any case, a majority of the beach must be designated entirely car-free.

In the case of special events which involve the use of vehicles on the beach a special management plan must be designed and applied to prevent ecosystems damage and users risk.

Camping is only allowed if it has been officially authorized in designated camping site areas based on zoning and load capacity.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

18. Regulation concerning dogs and other domestic animals on the beach must be strictly enforced

National laws concerning dogs and horses and other domestic animals on the beach must be strictly enforced and their access and activities, under all circumstances, must be controlled.

In most Blue Flag beaches, dogs and pets are permitted in the parking areas, on walkways and promenades in the back beach area, but they are not allowed to enter the sandy area of the beach, with the exception of guide dogs for blind people.

If dogs are accepted on the beach, they must be kept on leash or under close control on the beach and all adjoining or abutting areas throughout the bathing season, and the dog owners must be required to pick up any dog droppings. Dog refuse bins should be provided.

In the event that the beach is patrolled by mounted police on horseback or camels, measures must be taken to ensure that no faecal matter contaminates the beach.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

19. All buildings and equipment of the beach must be properly maintained

Equipment on the beach includes facilities or services not discussed in any other criteria, e.g. playgrounds and piers. These must be regularly maintained and checked in order to ensure that they are safe to use and that they do not interfere with an overall clean and aesthetic appearance of the beach.

Consideration should also be given to the appearance of structures by the beach. They should be well-integrated with the natural and built environment, respecting design standards and meeting environmental and aesthetic requirements.

Any construction work or hazardous derelict structures should be enclosed preventing access by the public, particularly small children. This should not detract from the enjoyment of the beach user.

What should be considered is: the cleanness of equipment, its condition, and the potential risk associated with its deterioration and malfunction. Furthermore notice should be taken of the environmental effects of paint and other materials used for maintaining the equipment/buildings. Environmentally sound products should be used whenever possible.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

20. Sustainable means of transportation must be promoted in the beach area

This criterion refers to all actions that:

- Encourage public and collective transport
- Encourage bicycling roads, bike renting and facilities for bike parking.
- Circulation plans to organise the traffic and reduce the peaks of traffic jam
- Development of pedestrian streets

The Blue Flag Programme welcomes the promotion of alternative means of transportation such as public transportation e.g. beach shuttles and bicycle rental or free bicycles and paths to the beach. Such initiatives should be given particular attention in communities with a high intensity of traffic in the beach area or in connection with the beach being located in a sensitive area.

It is recommended that the applicant has a traffic management plan that aims to reduce the load of traffic to and from the beaches of the community and the impact of such traffic on land use and air pollution in the coastal zone.

It is also recommended that information about the different modes of sustainable transportation available in the vicinity of the beach, be posted on the beach information board for the public.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
	All regions	

SAFETY AND SERVICES

21. An adequate number of lifeguards and/or lifesaving equipment must be available at the beach

It is recommended that the local authority has undertaken an official risk assessment of the beach (carried out by the appropriate national authority or body of expertise), and that an appropriate response strategy to the assessment has been ensured. It is the intention to require a risk assessment at Blue Flag beaches from 2012. FEE is cooperating with the International Lifesaving Federation (ILS) on the issue to find an appropriate system.

The provision of lifesaving personnel/equipment at a beach should be seen as only one element of an overall strategy, including information and education as well.

The presence of lifeguards at a Blue Flag beach is recommended in order to increase the safety level at the beach, especially in beaches with a high number of beach visitors. There must be an adequate number of lifeguards (minimum two) placed at appropriate intervals (200m recommended) according to the beach characteristics and use. The number of lifeguards can vary over the Blue Flag season according to peak and low use of the beach.

Lifeguards must have an appropriate national or international qualification. Only national/international certified lifeguards should be employed and their certificates should be checked prior to employment.

Lifeguards should only be employed for lifeguarding and not in combination with duties such as water sport rentals and services, cleaning or other.

Lifeguards must be easily recognisable, even on a crowded beach. It is therefore recommended that lifeguards wear the internationally recognised red/yellow uniform. Lifeguards must have appropriate lifesaving equipment.

Bathing areas patrolled by lifeguards should be explicit. The area should be defined both on the map at information points and/or physically on the beach with markers or flags. The following recognised flag zoning can be recommended: red = danger, red/yellow = lifeguard patrolled areas, black/white = surfing only (unless another national flag zoning system already exists).

Lifesaving equipment can replace lifeguards in beaches with low hazard risks and with few users.

Lifesaving equipment could include: life buoys, torpedo buoys, hook, life vests, life rafts, etc. The lifesaving equipment must include access to an emergency phone. The equipment should be regularly inspected and must fulfil national/international guidelines.

Where lifesaving equipment is provided, it should be clearly positioned, visible and located at regular intervals permitting it to be identified and reached quickly from any point on the beach. On beaches without lifeguards, maximum intervals of 100 meters between the equipment are recommended. Lifesaving equipment must be accompanied by instructions for use and what to do in the case of a rescue.

The period when the lifesaving equipment and/or lifeguards are available must be clearly marked on the beach information boards or at the lifeguard station.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

22. First aid equipment must be available on the beach

The first aid should either be available by way of a) a lifeguard on site, or b) an attended first aid station with trained personnel, or c) equipment located in a shop or other beach facilities at the beach, or d) directly available to the public on the beach.

First-aid equipment can either be in attended first-aid stations or as unattended, easily accessible equipment. It is strongly recommended that busy beaches and family beaches have attended first-aid stations. First-aid personnel must have appropriate qualifications.

First aid stations should have the following equipment (where applicable): a) adequate first aid stock (basic first aid commodities such as bandages, disinfectant, plaster, etc.), b) a basin with hot and cold water, c) first aid bed, d) oxygen cylinder and mask, e) immobilizing trauma board (e.g. bocks or spider harness), f) other equipment (shark attack pack), etc.

First-aid stations or the location of first-aid equipment must be clearly sign-posted for easy location by beach visitors (including at the map on the beach information board).

Times of availability of first-aid equipment, and alternative out-of-season arrangements should be displayed.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

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

Beaches that support multiple activities should manage the different conflicting and incompatible needs of different users to prevent accidents and conflicts. This could include zoning for swimmers, surfers, wind surfers and motorised craft. At the same time, recreational use of the beach must be considerate of and managed with respect for nature, atmosphere, and aesthetics.

Swimmers should be protected from all sea craft (whether using motor, sail or pedals). Where necessary, zoning should be made clear with the use of buoys, beacon or signs. The same should be done for surfing areas. Distinctions should be made between motorised craft and paddle or sail craft. The use of these various activities should be separated.

Power boats and powered craft should in general operate at least 100-200 meters away from the swimming area. The exact distance is to be determined by the local regulatory/competent agency. Furthermore, patrons who operate powered craft should be provided with some orientation on the use of the craft and the location of different zones.

Lifeguards (if present) must enforce the zoning of the different recreational areas in the water.

Consideration should also be given to potential noise nuisances from some activities (motorised activities, stereos and kites are some examples).

If special events are to be held on the beach then these should be located outside of the main swimming areas.

Different activities on the beach must also be clearly marked and zoned.

In the case that special activity events prevent the beach from upholding the Blue Flag criteria, then the flag must be withdrawn for the duration of the event. If such an event will take place, the public users of the beach should be notified of the upcoming event through public warnings, at the beach and preferably in the local media prior to the event.

Conflicts between recreational uses and nature conservation must also be considered and managed. It is unacceptable that recreational activities induce environmental degradation such as increased coastal erosion, irreversible damage to vegetation, tearing of seaweed from the sea bottom by anchoring leisure boats, pollution from their toilet tanks, and the disturbance of birds and other wildlife by motor craft.

The beach itself must be managed in an environmentally friendly manner that protects sensitive species and habitats at the beach (can be accomplished through zoning or with other preventive actions). Beaches used for turtle nesting must be without artificial lighting or have appropriate lighting. There should be fixed places for raising umbrellas, so that the eggs are not damaged. When cleaning the beach, this must be done with respect to the local flora and fauna. It must be assured that areas where turtles lay their eggs are left in peace. Beaches with sensitive dune habitats must be managed in an environmentally friendly way, for instance with protecting fences.

The use of insecticides for the sand or surrounding environment should be avoided.

Some beach sites may prove particularly sensitive and thus require careful planning and management of use. In such cases, evidence must be provided to show that recognised local conservation organisations or interests have been approached for advice and consultation and that the interests of protected sites and rare or protected species have been satisfactorily addressed.

In conclusion, it may be necessary to restrict, disperse or otherwise manage certain activities, both for the purpose of ensuring the enjoyment and safety of other beach users and for the purpose of nature protection.

This protection must be done for the visitors' safety and for the quality recreation of their body and soul, to prevent the beach from becoming a noisy play ground. Furthermore the protection is done to protect flora and fauna from too intensive use of the beach.

Besides the use of physical separation of the different users, zoning should be clearly indicated on the map on the beach information board and information could also be given at access and entry points.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

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

The emergency plan should cover a clearly identified procedure, aiming to be efficient in the case of an emergency. An emergency could be oil spills, hazardous/toxic waste spills entering the beach from the sea, discharge of storm water, hurricanes, algal blooms that could be dangerous, etc.

In order to quickly address pollution at the local level in co-ordination with local authorities the following should be included:

- Identification of the people to contact in case of pollution
- Involvement of all administration services and people necessary to intervene
- Procedure for the protection or evacuation of people if necessary
- Procedure of public warning and information

- Withdrawal of the Blue Flag

The emergency plan must specify who should be contacted in the case of a pollution incident. A responsible local person must be designated for this position. It must also specify who does what in the case of an emergency, including pollution incidents.

The emergency plan must furthermore prove the compliance with other national legislation on the area (like e.g. a national oil spill contingency plan).

The public should be informed of the pollution or potential danger by first posting the information at beach information points, then in the media, tourist offices or other relevant routes of communication as long as the hazard persists. If the hazard is in the form of polluted water then the public must be informed that bathing at this time is not safe. In order to protect the integrity of the Blue Flag and beach management it is absolutely crucial that the flag be withdrawn (and information posted at the beach information board) if there is any infringement of the criteria, e.g. sewage pollution.

In the Caribbean, emergency simulation exercise(s) should be conducted at least once a year.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

25. There must be safe access to the beach

A beach must be accessible in order to be eligible for the Blue Flag. In addition, this criterion prescribes that the access provided must be safe.

Thus, beaches that are physically challenging to access must have provisions that facilitate safe access, such as secured steps with handrails. Similarly, roads in the vicinity of the beach, which must be crossed to access the beach, must have designated crosswalks.

Beach promenades and steps onto the beach must be complete and in good condition in order to be safe. The car park surface must be in good order. Reserved places for disabled persons must be clearly marked and give easy access to resort facilities. Where it is absolutely necessary to park on the beach it must be safe, controlled, clearly marked and defined.

Other access paths must also be safe, with regulations for other traffic types such as cars and bicycles. Bicycle paths should be encouraged whenever relevant. Similarly, car and bicycle parking should be provided as needed and where appropriate.

Where promenade edges are higher than 2 metres above the beach, warning signs and/or a barrier should be set up to prevent accidental falls. This is especially important where the beach surface is rocky.

Please also consult criteria 28 regarding access for people with disabilities.

The public must have access to the Blue Flag beach without being a client of certain hotel or beach club. It should preferably be allowed free access to the beach (lie on the sand, take a bath and leave the beach without paying a fee). In some beaches (like private beaches), public access is provided through charging a small reasonable fee. Other payment can also be related to some kind of special service, connected to the area.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

26. The beach area must be patrolled

Visitors to the beach should be safe and feel safe from a security perspective. If needed, adequate security personnel must be available at the beach patrolling the area. Only trained and qualified guards must be in

charge of the patrolling. The guards must wear easily identified uniforms and should be able to show their licence as guards on requests.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
	South & East Africa, Brazil, Chile, South Pacific, Morocco	Europe, Canada, Oceania

27. A supply of potable drinking water must be available on the beach

There must be a potable water source on the beach, from a fountain, pipe, faucet, etc. This source can be in the toilet blocks or on the beach front but it must be protected from contamination by animals.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
	All regions	

28. A minimum of one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and toilet facilities provided for disabled persons

It is recommended that all Blue Flag beaches have handicap facilities, granting them access to the beach, surrounding buildings, and the toilets. At least one beach in every municipality must have such facilities.

Access to the beach should be facilitated by access ramps adapted to users with various disabilities. If possible, access to the water is recommended. It is recommended that the ramp design and material fit the natural environment and wherever possible, environmentally friendly materials are used, i.e. recycled composite plastics.

Toilet facilities should be designed for wheelchair and other disabled users. This access for the disabled should comply with the ISO Standard Code for Access. The beach must comply with national regulations regarding access and facilities for disabled persons, and it is recommended to contact the national organisation for disabled persons.

In addition, parking areas whenever provided should have reserved spaces for disabled person's parking.

In the event that access ramps cannot be provided due to the topography, i.e. steep cliffs or easily eroding coasts that cannot support access ramps, then the local authority must ask for dispensation for this criterion in their application. If none of the Blue Flag beaches in a municipality can provide access ramps for the disabled, the reason why must be documented for the National Jury through the application.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		

29. Map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed

A map showing the boundaries of the awarded beach and the location of key facilities and services should be posted at the beach information board. The map should be of a good quality and easy to read.

Pictograms should preferably be used. The required map elements (where applicable) are:

- lifeguards or lifesaving equipment
- first aid equipment
- telephones
- toilets (including toilets for disabled people)
- drinking water
- car and bicycle parking areas
- authorized camping sites at/near the beach
- larger waste receptacles
- recycling facilities
- water sampling point(s)
- access points and access for disabled

- foot paths
- zoning (swimming, surfing, sailing, boating, etc.)
- storm water outlets
- nearby natural sensitive areas, etc.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION	NON-APPLICABLE CRITERION
All regions		