

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION

Each beach must provide at least five environmental education activities to the public preferably during its Blue Flag season. It is possible for beaches managed by the same municipality to provide the same five environmental education activities. Activities can be active or passive in nature but must make sure to incorporate both environmental information and education components.¹

Each beach must have at least one Blue Flag information board in place, containing all the information required by the criteria listed below. For long beaches it is recommended that more than one Blue Flag information boards are installed (approximately one every 500 meters). All Blue Flag information boards must follow national standards with respect to information, content and design. These Blue Flag information boards must be in place at all Blue Flag beaches.

Criterion 1. Information about the Blue Flag Program must be displayed.

Information about the Blue Flag Program must be displayed on the Blue Flag information board. The correct Blue Flag logo must be used, in accordance with the FEE branding guidelines. The essence of each of the four categories of the Blue Flag criteria must be explained in this information. The length of the Blue Flag season must also be included.

The information could also be posted at other locations, e.g. at major access points, lifeguard stations, other beach facilities, or in parking areas. Tourist information offices should also have information about the Blue Flag Program.

Contact details for the local, national and international Blue Flag representatives must be posted as well.

In areas of international tourism, it is recommended that the information be provided in relevant languages.

In the event that the Blue Flag is temporarily withdrawn, a relevant notice must be posted at the beach informing the public as to the reasons why the flag was withdrawn.

Blue Flag beaches could promote the Green Key Program as another eco-label run by FEE with a message such as: “Along with the Blue Flag, the Foundation for Environmental Education also develops another eco-label for various tourism enterprises: Green Key. Find more information at: www.greenkey.global (or the national Green key website of the country)”

Appendix B provides an example of how the Blue Flag information can be presented.

Imperative Criterion

Criterion 2. Environmental education activities must be offered and promoted to beach users.

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

- increasing the awareness of, and care for, the local environment by recreational users and residents.

¹ Clarifies for communities that activities set up already which are passive and do not need management of participants are acceptable. Reference to focusing on environmental aspects and education early in the document will help National Operator staff communicate recommendations and feedback.

- training personnel and tourist service providers in environmental matters and best practices.
- encouraging the participation of local stakeholders in environmental management within the area.
- promoting sustainable recreation and tourism in the area.
- promoting the sharing of ideas and efforts between the Blue Flag Program and other FEE Programs (YRE, LEAF, Eco-Schools and Green Key).

The planned environmental education activities for the coming season must be included in the application documents, and so must a report on activities carried out during the previous Blue Flag season (if applicable).

At least five different activities must be offered to the municipality or community - preferably during 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 environment.

The educational activities must be effective and relevant, and each year the local authority must re-evaluate the activities that were implemented and work towards constantly improving them. Where the planned environmental education activities are of interest to, and involve, the general public or beach users, these activities must be publicized in good time to inform the public about the opportunities they offer. Such activities must also be publicized on the Blue Flag information board but could also be publicized in other areas in the beach area, in local centers, in newspapers and other media.

The environmental education activities must be clearly disseminated to the public. Preferably, the activities should be posted on the common information board. However, dissemination could include an updatable list posted at the kiosk or clubhouse, an SMS notification or other means of communication. Whatever the platform for dissemination is, it has to be stated on the information board where the user can find out more about the activities.

Furthermore, these environmental education activities must be offered for free to participants. A small participatory fee is accepted if needed to cover costs such as lunches, water, etc. but no business benefits can be made through these environmental education activities. Business sponsorship of activities or requests for donations by small organizations are acceptable. The intent is to keep these activities from becoming a tool for funding rather than a tool for education.

Local authorities/beach operators are encouraged to implement and/or support sustainable development projects in which public participation is a key element, e.g. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals initiatives.

If specific sensitive natural areas (including Marine Protected Areas) exist near a Blue Flag beach (e.g. mangroves or sea grass beds), it is strongly recommended that some of the educational activities address these sensitive natural areas.

Examples of good educational activities can be downloaded from the internal pages of the Blue Flag international website (www.blueflag.global).

Appendix C provides further background on the environmental education activities.

Imperative criterion

Criterion 3. Information about bathing water quality must be displayed.

Bathing water quality information must be displayed on the Blue Flag information board. [Local authorities may choose to display the water quality results virtually through incorporation of a QR code on the Blue Flag Information Board²](#). It is recommended that a table or figure with easily identifiable symbols that correspond to the results be used [both online and if present physically on the board](#).

The information must also clearly explain how the water quality results relate to the imperative criteria for water quality, with specific reference to sampling frequency and the conditions under which Blue Flag status can be withdrawn.

The authority in charge of providing the bathing water quality results must do so shortly after the analysis so that the data can be updated regularly. It is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the beach operator/beach management receives the information no later than one month after the sampling date. The complete and detailed data must be made available by the local authority to anybody upon request.

Appendix D provides an example of how this information could be presented

Imperative Criterion

Criterion 4. Information relating to local eco-systems, environmental elements and cultural sites must be displayed.

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that beach users are well informed and educated about relevant environmental elements (including valuable cultural sites/communities), local ecosystems and any sensitive areas in the surrounding environment so that they are encouraged to learn about and experience the environment in a responsible way.

Information about coastal zone ecosystems, wetland areas, unique habitats or any sensitive natural areas must be displayed at or close to the Blue Flag beach. The information must include details about the natural area and a code of conduct for visitors to the area. If the full information is not available on the Blue Flag information board, there must at least be a short notice on the board informing the public about the nearby sensitive areas and where they can find further information.

Relevant environmental information could furthermore be displayed at tourist sites, at the natural areas, or in tourist information offices. The information can be published in tourist brochures, local newspapers or pamphlets created specifically for this purpose. In areas that are visited by a high number of tourists, it is recommended that the information be presented in more than one way, as listed above, and it should be presented in relevant languages.

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

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 5. A map of the beach indicating different facilities must be displayed.

² [The US criteria for Water Quality have strengthened testing for Enterococci to weekly. While we feel increasing the frequency of testing represents the norm and an excellent level of water quality in the US, we understand that posting this information physically may cause strain on beach managers and staff and increase the size of the sign. Use of a QR code allows those to access all the water quality information and at more locations without increasing signage or workload.](#)

A map showing the boundaries of the Blue Flag beach area and the location of key facilities and services must be posted on the Blue Flag information board. The map must be of good quality, easy to read and properly oriented. It is recommended that maps also be available through digital formats.

Pictograms should preferably be used.

The required map elements (where applicable) should include “You are here” pointers, and show the location of:

- lifeguards or lifesaving equipment
- the area patrolled (for beaches with lifeguards)
- first aid equipment
- telephones
- toilets (including toilets for disabled people)
- drinking water
- car and bicycle parking areas
- authorized camping sites at/near the beach
- recycling facilities
- location of water sampling point(s)
- access points and access for disabled persons
- zoning (swimming, surfing, sailing, boating, etc.) where applicable
- nearby public transport
- footpaths
- demarcation of Blue Flag area
- location of other information boards
- rivers and inflows
- local landmarks (where applicable)
- storm water outlets
- nearby sensitive natural areas, etc.
- direction (North)

- scale bar

For guidelines on the design and suitability of maps for Blue Flag beaches, visit www.blueflag.global.

Imperative criterion

Criterion 6. A code of conduct that reflects appropriate laws and/or regulations governing the use of the beach and surrounding areas must be displayed.

The code of conduct must address the activities of beach users and their conduct on the beach. The beach code of conduct must be displayed on the Blue Flag information board. The information could furthermore be posted at other locations, e.g. at all major entrance points, near to the relevant activity (i.e. a “No Diving” sign on a pier) or as information at the relevant sites. Internationally recognized symbols, e.g. pictograms, must be used wherever possible.

The code of conduct must include rules about the presence of domestic animals, zoning (when appropriate), fishing, litter management, the use of vehicles, camping, fires, etc.

Laws and/or regulations governing beach usage and management should be available to the public at the office of the local authority/beach operator.

The period when the lifesaving equipment and/or lifeguards, and first aid, are available must be clearly marked on the Blue Flag information boards and at the lifeguard station. An explanation of the emergency flag system in use must also be provided.

Imperative criterion.

WATER QUALITY

The Blue Flag program requires that beaches achieve Excellent bathing water quality. The bathing water quality standards have been based on the most appropriate international and national standards and legislation.

Blue Flag is an international eco-award and it therefore has one minimum global standard for water quality. The standards described here for bathing water quality for beaches must be adopted unless stricter national standards are already in existence, e.g. testing for total coliform bacteria. In that case, the beach must comply with the more demanding national standards for bathing water quality.

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

A Blue Flag beach must have at least one sampling point, which must be located where the concentration of bathers is highest. In addition, where there are potential sources of pollution, e.g. near streams, rivers or other inlets, storm water outlets, etc. additional sampling points must be established at these sites to provide evidence that such inflows do not affect bathing water quality.

All sampling points of the applicant beach must comply with the Blue Flag bathing water quality criteria.

Samples for microbiological and physical–chemical parameters must be taken.

Similarly, in the case of inland waters where the water is supplemented by outside sources during dry periods, the water quality of the outside source must meet the Blue Flag bathing water quality standards.

Samples should ~~reflect up to date techniques approved by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) be taken 30 cm below the water surface except for the mineral oil samples that should be taken at surface level.~~¹

How often must a sample be taken?

For each sampling point, there must be no more than ~~73~~¹ days² between any two water samples during the Blue Flag season. This includes the gap between the pre-season sample and the following in-season sample. The Blue Flag Program does not accept applications from beaches, irrespective of the length of the Blue Flag season, where less than five samples have been taken. This means that a minimum of five samples must be taken, evenly distributed during the season. The first sample must be taken within 31 days before the official starting date of the Blue Flag season.

Only one sample value per day is to be recorded in the percentile calculation.

When sample results raise concern of a possible increase in levels of pollution, it is recommended to temporarily increase the sampling frequency in order to track any possible pollution incident.

In the event of short-term pollution, one additional sample is to be taken to confirm that the incident has ended. This sample is not part of the set of bathing water quality data. If it is necessary to replace a

¹ Criterion 7 should reflect that each state sets its own water quality standards and procedures, which are then approved by the EPA.

² Most beaches in the US are already testing at this frequency. Therefore, any greater time frame would not be an example of “excellent” water quality.

discarded sample, an additional sample is to be taken seven days after the end of the short-term pollution. Discounting of samples because of short-term pollution during the last assessment period is allowed for maximum 15% of the total number of samples provided for in the monitoring calendar established for that period, or one sample per bathing season, whichever is greater.

When calculating 15% of the total number of samples provided for that period, the result must be rounded up or down.

The rule is:

Anything lower or equal to ,49 should be rounded down (for example: a result of 2,49 gives a possibility of discounting 2 samples).

Anything higher or equal to ,50 should be rounded up (for example: a result of 2,50 gives a possibility of discounting 3 samples).

Both the original and the additional samples have to be sent as a dispensation case to the International Jury for the evaluation (*see Appendix A on dispensation cases*).

In case of an oil spill, abnormal weather or other extreme events which can have a serious adverse effect on the quality of the bathing water or the health of the bathers, the beach manager must temporarily take down the Blue Flag and clearly state the reason on the information board. It is recommended that the wording of this information is along these lines: "This beach has recently experienced abnormal weather/extreme event. Swimming is not recommended at this time due to the possibility of pollution/danger to the bathers."

Imperative Criterion

Criterion 8. The beach must fully comply with the standards and requirements for water quality analysis.

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

An independent laboratory must carry out the analysis of the bathing water samples. The laboratory must be nationally, ~~or~~ internationally, or state³ accredited to carry out microbiological and physical-chemical analyses. The testing method and data resulting from it must also be accredited.

In the event that the sampler or the laboratory is not independent, at the time of application a dispensation must be requested and details provided as to why this is required, e.g. in some cases beaches are considerable distances away from the services necessary to meet this requirement.

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 analysis that ensure a certain trueness, reproducibility, repeatability and comparability between methods should be used. FEE follows

³ Each state sets its own standards for methodology which is approved by the EPA. Further, there is no national level accreditation of recreational water testing laboratories. Lab technicians are also accredited at the state level and language in criterion 8 should reflect this.

European (CEN) or International (ISO) standards in its recommendations regarding parameters and acceptable methods of analysis.

Water quality results must be provided to the National Operator as soon as they are made available but not later than one month after the sample has been taken.

A sampling calendar must be established prior to the start of the bathing season. Sampling must take place no later than four days after the date specified in the sampling calendar, unless there are exceptional circumstances preventing this. In such a case, the National Jury must submit the beach as a dispensation case to the International Jury (*see Appendix A for more information on dispensation cases*).

Sampling history:

The water quality results for the previous four seasons must accompany all applications. In order to be eligible for the Blue Flag, the beach must show -through these reports- that the bathing water quality standards were met in the previous seasons.

For new countries or new beaches, results from a minimum of 20 samples per sampling point taken within the proposed Blue Flag season must be available for Blue Flag accreditation to be considered. The sampling history may be taken in one Blue Flag season in order to be able to apply the following year. The applicant beach may also choose to take fewer samples and wait to apply when 20 samples per sampling point have been collected (for example taking 10 samples in year 1, 10 more in year 2 and applying in year 3). Remember that a minimum of 5 samples has to be taken per Blue Flag season, and that the sampling frequency detailed in criterion 7 must be respected.

The water quality information of the current season must be posted on the Blue Flag information board, in accordance with Criterion 3. *See Appendix D for a recommendation for presenting water quality information on Blue Flag beaches.*

Imperative Criterion

Criterion 9. Industrial, wastewater or sewage-related discharges must not affect the beach area.

A bathing water profile must be compiled for every Blue Flag beach [application](#)⁴. A bathing water profile includes identification of potential sources of pollution, a description of the physical, geographical and hydrological characteristics of the bathing water, as well as an assessment of the potential for cyanobacteria and algae formation.

It is recommended that there should not be any industrial, urban wastewater or sewage-related discharges into the Blue Flag area or immediate buffer zone/surrounding area. If there are discharge points in the area of the beach, these must be documented at the time of application.

Where combined sewage overflow discharges or other urban/industrial waste water discharges are identified within, or immediately adjacent to, the proposed award area, information to warn the public that there is an intermittent discharge which could, in the short term, impact the bathing water quality must be provided.

⁴ [Included to clarify that this criterion is to inform the National Operator and not information that needs to be included in Blue Flag public information unless requested.](#)

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The collection, treatment and discharge of urban wastewater in the community must meet national/ international standards and comply with national/international legislation. For EU member countries, there are requirements for the treatment and effluent quality given in the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC). A number of new EU countries have been granted dispensation from the EU Directive. Regardless of national/ international standards and legislation, this wastewater or other discharges must not negatively affect the environment or compromise the water quality standards of a Blue Flag beach.

Regarding industrial pollution, notification must be given about industrial facilities and plants in the vicinity of the beaches, stating their likely influence on the environment. Moreover, the appropriate authorities must confirm in writing that the area is being monitored to ascertain the environmental impacts of nearby industrial facilities and confirm that the facilities do not pose a public health risk or environmental hazard.

Imperative Criterion

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

Beach sites applying for the Blue Flag Award should meet the microbiological parameters ~~to be monitored~~ are given below or their state's recreational water quality standard, whichever is stricter:

Parameter	Coastal and transitional waters Limit values	Inland waters Limit values
Escherichia coli (Faecal Colibacteria)	250 cfu/100 ml	500 cfu/100 ml
Intestinal Enterococci (streptococci)	100 cfu/100 ml	200 cfu/100 ml

• cfu = colony forming units (of bacteria)

Accepted percentile:

For the evaluation of an applicant beach the Blue Flag Program requires 95th percentile compliance with the above limit values. This is in accordance with the EU Bathing Water Directive (2006) as well as the recommendation of the World Health Organization. The percentile has to be calculated for each parameter and also met for each parameter. For example, if the 95th percentile is below the limit values for *Escherichia coli* but not for Intestinal Enterococci then the beach cannot be awarded with the Blue Flag.

Details on how to calculate the 95th percentile can be found in Appendix F. A calculation spreadsheet, however, is available on the internal Blue Flag database. All bathing water sample results must be entered into the spreadsheet and the percentiles will be calculated automatically. This sheet must be sent to Blue Flag International with the application.

For EU countries implementing the Blue Flag it is imperative that an applicant beach is classified as having 'Excellent' water quality.

As stated previously, discounting of a sample may be considered in case of extreme (weather) conditions. Should this be necessary, applicant beaches must be sent in as dispensation cases. *See Appendix A for further details on dispensation cases.*

Imperative Criterion

Criterion 11. The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for physical parameters.

Water quality can also be affected by physical and chemical parameters such as oil and floatables:

▲ There must be no oil film visible on the surface of the water and no odor detected. Ashore and on land the beach must be monitored for oil and emergency plans should include the required action to take in case of such pollution.

The presence of Harmful Algal Blooms or Red Tides which affect the water quality must be monitored and plans for advisories or beach closures be created. Advisories and closures must be communicated to the public through use of the Informational Board and communication resources.

▲ No floatables may be present, such as tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers, glass or any other substances.

Immediate action should be taken if abnormal changes are detected. This includes abnormal changes in the color, transparency and turbidity of the water. Should physical and chemical pollution be detected repeatedly, the Blue Flag must be taken down for the remainder of the season and the beach will not be eligible for the Blue Flag the following year, unless the applicant fulfils the conditions for applying as a dispensation case.

Other tests can be conducted, such as the pH value of the water (its value ranges from 6 to 9 in most bathing waters).

Imperative criterion

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

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

The beach management committee should be charged with ensuring compliance with all environmental management criteria, including Coastal and Marine Protected Area requirements if appropriate. The committee should consist of all relevant stakeholders at the local level. Relevant stakeholders could be a local authority representative, hotel manager, beach manager, lifeguard, educational representative, local NGO, or other stakeholders such as community representatives, special user groups, Coastal and Marine Protected Area representatives, etc.

The beach management committee should co-operate with and support the local authority/beach operator and could institute environmental management systems and conduct environmental audits of the beach and its facilities.

Where appropriate, a beach management committee may operate over a number of Blue Flag beaches within a local authority or an area/region, i.e. there is no need for a separate beach management committee for each individual Blue Flag beach.

Guideline criterion.

Criterion 13. The local authority/beach operator must comply with all laws and/or regulations affecting the location and operation of the beach.

The beach must comply with federal, state, and local laws ~~and/or~~ regulations and/or executive orders pertaining to issues related to coastal zone planning, environmental management, floodplain and storm hazard management, wastewater management, environmental conservation, and others in order to receive and maintain Blue Flag status. The applicant must ensure that the facilities and activities under his/her responsibility comply with these laws and/or regulations. The management of the beach location, facilities, beach operation and immediate surrounding area must comply with official development plans and planning regulations. Applicable laws, regulations, and orders ~~The legislation may include those regulations for land-use zoning and planning, building codes, sewage/industrial waste effluent discharge, environmental health, conservation plans, operations licenses and permits, etc.~~ ~~The legislation may include regulations for land-use zoning and planning, sewage/industrial waste effluent discharge, environmental health, conservation plans, operations licenses and permits, etc.~~

The location of facilities and use of the beach area and its vicinity must be subject to planning guidelines.

The beach, its facilities and management practices must comply with any applicable Findings of No Significant Impact or Records of Decision prepared pursuant to federal, state, or local ~~This includes environmental impact assessment requirements. This includes environmental impact assessments.~~ At the time of application for Blue Flag status, the applicant authority must provide written evidence from the planning department building commission, or other appropriate government entity responsible for building codes and their enforcement that all buildings on the beach meet local current 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 environmental conservation regulations. The inland beach area, including dunes, paths, and parking areas must be properly maintained according to coastal zone management principles.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 14. Sensitive areas **and Species must be protected and managed.**

Areas

Some sites at/near the Blue Flag beach may be very sensitive and require special management. In these cases, the beach operator must consult an appropriate conservation organization or expert for advice on how to manage these sites. Where areas require special management, at the time of application, the applicant must provide confirmation that this consultation has taken place and that the recommended management plan will be implemented.

However, the sensitivity of certain areas may prevent them from being part of a Blue Flag beach or from having information posted at the beach directing people to the area. An increased number of visitors could endanger wildlife and/or habitats, e.g. using land space for the construction of facilities, parking, paths, etc. As a general rule, Blue Flag accreditation is only given to sites that can demonstrate management of visitors and recreational use that prevents long-term irreversible damage to the local natural environment.

If a Blue Flag beach is in or near a Coastal and/or Marine Protected Area, it is necessary to consult with the Coastal and/or Marina Protected Areas management in order to ensure compatibility with ecosystem conservation and biodiversity goals.

Species

The applicant should acquire a list of endangered, threatened or sensitive species that are found on or near the beach (contact the state natural heritage program) as well as the agency responsible for their protection. The respective agencies should be consulted for guidance in protecting and maintaining habitat and reducing disturbance to species when they are most vulnerable to disturbance such as breeding and nesting times. Beach management and operations should be conducted in accordance with endangered and threatened species recovery guidelines, best management practices and any additional guidance provided by consulted agencies¹.

It is recommended these areas and species are included in environmental education and information criteria listed above.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 15. **The beach must be clean.**

The beach and surrounding areas, including paths, parking areas and access paths to the beach must always be clean and maintained. Litter should not be allowed to accumulate causing these areas to become unsightly or hazardous.

The beach must comply with national guidelines or legislation concerning litter and waste management. Beach cleaning may be mechanical or manual, depending on the size, appearance, and sensitivity of the beach and its surroundings. In high use areas, where possible, mechanical sieving and deep cleaning of the sand should be carried out occasionally to remove small size waste, such as cigarette butts, plastic pieces, and Styrofoam, etc.

¹ In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, the US believes it is important to highlight management practices which protect not just areas (which can move as species interact with the environment) but the species themselves which are variable across the country. Language was provided by NWF staff.

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During storm water flows, the outlets and surrounding areas must be kept clean.

Cleaning of the beach must be carried out with consideration for local flora and fauna, e.g. where turtles may have buried eggs in the sand. The use of insecticides or chemicals for cleaning the sand or surrounding environment is not allowed. Cleaning in Protected Areas as well as sensitive areas (sand dunes, etc.), must be done in accordance with the existing laws and regulations, and advice from the relevant authority.

For information about the management of algal waste and seaweed, refer to criterion 16. To determine the cleanliness level of the beach, it is recommended that a Beach Litter Measuring system, or similar system, be used. (See Appendix G for further details).

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 16. Algal vegetation or natural debris must be left on the beach.

Algal vegetation is generally accepted as referring to seaweed. Seaweed and other vegetation/natural debris are natural and vital components of both freshwater and marine and beach ecosystems. Such natural debris ~~These ecosystems~~ must be considered as living and natural environments and not approached as only as a recreational liability, hindrance, or aesthetic area asset to be kept tidy. When and where vegetation accumulation is persistent on the beach, it is recommended that a seaweed and vegetative/natural debris management strategy be developed as a part of the beach management plan. ~~Thus,~~ ~~†~~ The management of seaweed or other vegetation/natural detritus on the shore should be sensitive to both visitor ecosystem, needs and biodiversity needs. Natural disposal by tides and waves at the beach is accepted, and the decay of seaweed and vegetative/natural debris is necessary to support coastal environmental assets so long as it does not create a public health or safety hazard or significantly adversely impact environmental assets ~~as long as it does not create a nuisance.~~

Vegetation ~~Therefore seaweed and vegetative/natural debris should be allowed to accumulate but not to the point where it becomes a hazard; removal should occur only where and when however, only if it is absolutely necessary. Conditions triggering removal must be clearly identified in the beach management plan and may include such triggers as: excessive accumulations (e.g., due to algal blooms), of seaweed in warm weather causing decay, which in turn produces odours that attract flies and their larvae. Rotting seaweed could also be slippery and become a hazard for people walking on the shoreline It could also reduce and the need to maintain access to areas of the beach for recreational activities or for disabled users. If and when seaweed or other vegetative/natural debris must be removed, it is recommended that removal focus on limited areas where the accumulation creates hazards and that other areas retain some of the seaweed and vegetative and natural debris. inot 100% of the seaweed is removed, but that removal focuses on the areas where the accumulation creates problems.~~

Consideration must be given to its disposal in an environmentally-friendly way, e.g., through dune building, composting, or fertilizer use. It is recommended that not 100% of the seaweed is removed, but that removal focuses on the areas where the accumulation creates problems. Wherever possible, Environmental specialists should be consulted when developing or revising the management plan for seaweed and other vegetative/natural debris on the beach. Vegetation should not be allowed to accumulate to the point where it becomes a hazard, however, only if it is absolutely necessary should vegetation be removed. This could include accumulation of seaweed in

~~warm weather causing decay, which in turn produces odors that attract flies and their larvae. Rotting seaweed could also be slippery and become a hazard for people walking on the shoreline. It could also reduce access to the beach for recreational activities or for disabled users.~~

~~If vegetation is removed, then consideration must be given to its disposal in an environmentally friendly way, e.g. through composting or for fertilizer use. It is recommended that not 100% of the seaweed is removed, but that removal focuses on the areas where the accumulation creates problems. Wherever possible, environmental specialists should be consulted regarding the management of algal vegetation on the beach.~~

~~In some areas, Where seaweed is compiled and arranged on the beach to be dried on the beach for later use as fertilizer or dune stabilizer. While this good practice should not be discouraged, it is also necessary to ensure that this area # does not create a hazzardnuisance for beach users.~~

~~If vegetation accumulation is persistent on the beach, it is recommended that a seaweed management strategy is developed, as a part of the beach management plan.~~

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 17. Waste disposal bins/containers must be available at the beach in adequate numbers and they must be regularly maintained.

Waste disposal bins or litterbins (preferably with covers) should be of a suitable design and appearance as well as being functional. It is recommended that bins made of environmentally friendly products are used, e.g. bins made of recycled composite plastics or wood.

There should be an adequate number of bins 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 bins are emptied determine the number and minimum space between bins placed on the beach. During the peak tourist season, the spacing between bins and the frequency of emptying should be adjusted as necessary.

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

- Bin capacity.
- Environmentally friendly products.
- Type and source of litter.
- Volume of pedestrian traffic.
- 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 the waste is properly disposed.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 18. Facilities for the separation of recyclable waste materials must be available at the beach.

Should the community have a local recycling facility, containers must be made available at the beach for these materials, e.g. glass, cans, plastic, paper, etc. The receptacles should be properly designed and managed for the type of waste received, should be emptied regularly, and be well placed for accessibility.

The recycling facilities should accommodate the collection and separation of as many different types of materials as possible, three being the minimum.

On application, the local authority/beach operator must indicate whether the local authority has facilities for the recycling of waste. If no such facilities exist, the applicant must apply for a dispensation from this criterion.

Blue Flag encourages all local authorities/beach operators to promote recycling and waste separation at the beach, even if the community does not have a local recycling facility.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 19. An adequate number of toilet or restroom facilities must be provided.

The number of toilets/restrooms, including port-a-toilets,² 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.

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The toilet or restroom facilities must be easy to locate through signage and through information on the map on the Blue Flag information board.

The presence of showers (on the beach or in the buildings), changing rooms and nappy changing facilities are furthermore encouraged. Restrooms/toilets may also be located in nearby shops, restaurants, cafeterias or other establishments open to the general public. Facilities for disabled visitors should also be provided (see criterion 32).

Toilet or restrooms facilities must be equipped with sanitizers, washbasins, soap, and clean towels (paper or cloth) or a hand-dryer.

Access to the toilet/restroom facilities must be safe.

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

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 20. The toilet or restroom facilities must be kept clean.

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

The use of environmentally friendly cleaning materials, soap and towels is recommended.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 21. The toilet or restroom facilities must have controlled sewage disposal.

² Clearly identifies that this criterion allows portable toilets.

Sewage or effluent from the toilets must not enter the ground or the water untreated. In villages, communities, or in a municipality with sewage treatment facilities, the toilet facilities must be connected to the municipal sewer.

For facilities located outside areas serviced by the municipal sewage system and/or at remotely located beaches, individual treatment and regularly emptied holding tanks that prevent untreated sewage, effluent or seepage from entering the ground or the water -and which do not adversely affect the environment- are acceptable.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 22. There must be no unauthorized camping or driving and no dumping on the beach

Unauthorized camping, driving and dumping must be prohibited on the beach. Information about these restrictions must be displayed at the beach (as part of the code of conduct, Criterion 6).

~~Vehicles~~ Personal vehicles (except for those used for the purpose of cleaning, ~~and~~ safety, and limited ability access, e.g. for moving lifeguard equipment, other power-driven mobility devices³, or emergency vehicles) must not be allowed on Blue Flag beaches. For cases, ~~however~~, where vehicles cannot be entirely prohibited due to local or state regulations, this must be adequately justified, and they must be properly managed through permitting and enforcement. Areas for driving and parking, as well as car-free zones, must be designated and, whenever the situation requires it, police or traffic guards must control the beach. If vehicles are allowed, they must be prohibited from entering the high-water zone at any time. The major part of the beach must be designated entirely vehicle-free. ~~These sites~~ Sites which engage in managed private vehicle access must submit their application with a dispensation claim for this criterion.⁴

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Where there are no physical barriers preventing access to the beach by vehicles and where there are problems with unauthorized vehicles, camping or dumping, bylaws must be put in place to prohibit these activities. Information about these by-laws must be displayed. The use of the beach or its nearby areas as dumps for litter and other waste is not accepted.

In the case of special planned events that involve the use of vehicles on the beach a special management plan must be drawn up and applied to prevent damage to the ecosystem, as well as risks to beach users. *See Appendix H for guidelines on events on Blue Flag beaches.*

Parking for emergency vehicles must be provided in close proximity to the beach.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 23. Access to the beach by dogs and other domestic animals must be strictly controlled.

Dogs or pets, other than assistance dogs are not allowed on a Blue Flag beach or in the Blue Flag area if it is part of a larger beach. If presence of pets is permitted by the local and national legislation, animals are only allowed in the parking areas, walkways and promenades in the inland beach area and must under control.

³ Inserts language to protect the access rights of limited ability users who may use a powered device to access the beach.

⁴ Language edits to clarify that personal vehicles are prohibited on Blue Flag awarded sites. In those places where it is legal in the US to bring a personal vehicle on the beach it is clarified that they can still apply but there may be more paperwork and management requirements for receipt of the award.

If the beach is patrolled by mounted police measures must be taken to ensure that no faecal matter contaminates the beach.

Wherever possible stray animals must be managed, and systems should be in place to remove stray animals from the beach. Measures must also be put in place to prevent access to the beach by stray animals. If stray animals are able to access the beach and cannot be controlled, it is recommended that the beach operator/local authority erect signs informing the public about this fact. It is also recommended that information be displayed about what the public should do should stray animals be seen on the beach.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 24. All buildings and beach equipment must be properly maintained.

Consideration must be given to the appearance of buildings and structures at the beach. They should be well integrated within the natural and built environment, should adhere to construction standards and meet environmental and aesthetic requirements.

Equipment on the beach includes facilities or services not discussed in any other criteria, e.g. playgrounds and piers. Equipment must be regularly maintained and checked in order to ensure that it is safe to use. Consideration must be given to the cleanliness of equipment, its condition, the environmental effects of paint and other materials used for maintaining the equipment/buildings and any potential risk associated with its deterioration and malfunction. Wherever possible, environmentally friendly products should be used.

All construction work or hazardous structures must be fenced off to prevent access by the public. When and if construction takes place during the Blue Flag season, all Blue Flag criteria must be met during the period of the construction. Also, the construction activities must not affect beach users.

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 25. Marine and freshwater sensitive habitats (such as coral reefs or sea grass beds) in the vicinity of the beach must be monitored.

If there is a sensitive habitat (such as coral reef or sea grass beds) located within 500 meters from any part of a Blue Flag beach, a monitoring program must be established to monitor the health of the habitat (coral reef or sea grass beds) at least once a season.

An expert organization or relevant authority must be consulted regarding the monitoring and management of this sensitive area.

The "Reef Check" Coral Reef Monitoring Program could be used. *See Appendix G for further details of the Reef Check monitoring system.*

Imperative criterion.

Criterion 26. A sustainable means of transportation should be promoted in the beach area.

This criterion refers to all actions that:

- encourage public and collective transport.
- encourage bicycling, bike renting and facilities for bike parking.
- support plans to organize traffic and reduce the peak traffic periods.
- develop pedestrian access.

The Blue Flag Program encourages the promotion of alternative means of transportation, e.g. beach shuttles, bicycle rental or free bicycles. Such initiatives should be given particular attention in communities with high traffic densities in the beach area or where the beach is located in a sensitive area.

It is recommended that the local authority/beach operator implements a traffic management plan to reduce traffic volumes and the impact of traffic on land use and air pollution in the Blue Flag and surrounding areas.

It is also recommended that information about the availability of sustainable transportation be made available on the Blue Flag information board.

Imperative criterion.

SAFETY AND SERVICES

Criterion 27. **Appropriate public safety control measures must be implemented.**

The beach operator must ensure that safety measures comply with ~~the national~~ any local, county, state, and federal legislation or regulations ¹ regarding beach safety.

The beach operator shall undertake a safety risk assessment for each designated bathing area applying for the Blue Flag Award. This safety risk assessment is to be carried out by the United States Lifesaving Association (the Full Member organization of the International Life Saving Federation in the USA).²

~~Moreover, it is strongly recommended that the beach operator undertakes a safety risk assessment for each designated bathing area. This safety risk assessment is to be carried out by the appropriate national~~ ³authorities or, where applicable, by a Full Member organization of the International Life Saving Federation (I.L.S), see Appendix I.

The public safety control measures enumerated in the safety risk assessment shall be implemented. For elements that do not directly impact safety, a phase-in period may be permitted on a case-by-case basis.

~~The public safety control measures recommended by the safety risk assessment should be implemented as a priority, based on available resources.~~

Irrespective of the above, a Blue Flag beach with a high number of visitors must be guarded/patrolled by an adequate number of lifeguards placed at appropriate intervals as recommended in the risk assessment and according to the beach characteristics and use. ~~The number of lifeguards must increase according to peak usage, and a minimum of two every 200m is recommended for those beaches which have not undertaken a risk assessment.~~

Lifeguards must have appropriate national ~~or international~~ qualifications. ~~Certificates must be checked prior to employment and must be made available to the National Operator upon request.~~ Lifeguard provider agencies must be currently certified by the United States Lifesaving Association under the USLA Lifeguard Agency Certification Program (www.usla.org/certification).⁴ Lifeguards must only be employed for lifeguarding and not in combination with other duties, such as water sports, rentals and services, cleaning etc.

Lifeguards must be easily recognizable. It is therefore recommended that lifeguards wear the internationally recognized red/yellow uniform. Lifeguards must be provided with appropriate lifesaving equipment in accordance with USLA guidelines.

Bathing areas patrolled by lifeguards should be identified in a manner that is readily understandable to the public. The area must be defined on the map, on the information board and/or physically on the beach with markers or flags. Flags and signs should be in accordance with ISO 20712 and additional

¹ There is no national level legislation regarding beach safety.

² We are requiring all beaches to undergo a risk assessment. The rest of the criterion language will reflect this change.

³ There is no national authority carrying out safety risk assessments in the United States (US).

⁴ The US does not provide certificates to individual lifeguards. Instead the training is certified as meeting national educational standards.

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guidance from the International Life Saving Federation (www.ilsf.org). Additionally, Blue Flag international pictograms should be used.

Bathing areas patrolled by lifeguards must be clearly marked out. The area must be defined on the map, on the information board and/or physically on the beach with markers or flags. The International Lifesaving Federation (ILS) recommends that flags and signs should be in accordance with ISO 20712. Additionally, Blue Flag international pictograms should be used.

On beaches, with low hazard risks and with average of less than 50 beach users per day over a period of four weeks during the high season public rescue equipment can replace lifeguards, unless legislation or the safety risk assessment states otherwise.

On beaches, with low hazard risks and with few (1) users public rescue equipment can replace lifeguards, unless the national legislation or the safety risk assessment states otherwise.

Public rescue equipment could include: throwable life rings or U.S. Coast Guard approved throwable devices, for example, as approved in the risk assessment. The equipment must be regularly inspected and must meet national/international guidelines.

Public rescue equipment could include: life buoys, hooks, lifejackets, life rafts, etc. The equipment must be regularly inspected and must fulfil national/international guidelines.

Where public rescue equipment is provided, it must be clearly positioned, visible and located at regular intervals, allowing it to be reached quickly from any point on the beach. On beaches without lifeguards, maximum intervals of 100 meters between the equipment are recommended ~~for those beaches which have not undertaken a risk assessment~~. Public rescue equipment must be accompanied by instructions for use and what to do in the event of a rescue. It is recommended that the location of equipment is identified by an emergency marker. The location of the lifesaving equipment/lifeguard tower must be indicated on the beach map on the Blue Flag information boards.

~~*1 Few = An average of less than 50 beach users per day over a period of 4 weeks during the high season.*~~

The period when the public rescue equipment and/or lifeguards, and first aid are available must be clearly marked on the Blue Flag information boards and at the lifeguard station(s). An explanation of the beach safety flag system in use must be provided. The Blue Flag should not be flown at times that lifeguards or safety equipment specified in the risk assessment are not present.

The lifesaving equipment must include information for who to call in an emergency and information on the location of the nearest access to an emergency phone, unless the risk assessment states otherwise. The equipment must be regularly inspected and must ~~meet fulfil~~ national/international guidelines.

The beach operator must provide safety instructions which must be posted on the information board and other appropriate place(s) on the beach.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

Criterion 28. First aid equipment must be available on the beach.

The first aid may be available by means of: a) ~~a~~ lifeguards on site, and/or b) an attended first aid station with trained personnel, and/or c) equipment located in a shop or other beach facility at the beach, and/or

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d) first aid box directly available to the public on the beach. ~~It is strongly recommended that busy beaches and family beaches have first aid stations with staff in attendance. First aid personnel must have appropriate qualifications.~~⁵

First aid stations should have the following equipment a) adequate first aid stock (basic first aid supplies such as bandages, gloves, disinfectant, plasters, etc.) b) cold water and, preferably, hot water c) first aid bed d) oxygen cylinder and mask e) immobilizing trauma board (e.g. immobilizing blocks 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 so that beach visitors may easily locate them (including on the map of the Blue Flag information board). See Criterion 5. In addition, the period during which first aid is available must be clearly informed.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

Criterion 29. **Emergency plans to cope with pollution risks must be in place.**

The emergency plan must provide a clearly identified procedure, facilitating efficiency in the case of an emergency. An emergency could result from oil spills, hazardous/toxic waste spills entering the beach from the sea, discharge of storm water, hurricanes, algal blooms that could be dangerous, etc. An emergency in this context would be defined as an event which leads to a ~~large-scale~~large-scale impact on the beach or bathing water.

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

- identification of individuals to contact in case of pollution.
- involvement of all administration services and individuals 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 compliance with other national legislation in the area, e.g. a national oil spill contingency plan.

As long as the hazard persists, the public should be informed of the pollution or potential danger by posting information at the beach, at all access points, in the media, tourist offices and through any other relevant means of communication. If the hazard is in the form of large-scale polluted water then the public must be informed that bathing is not safe and the beach should be closed to swimming. A case of

⁵ Under criterion 27 amended to require USLA certified training, the lifeguards must be appropriately trained in providing medical aid and equipped to do so. Therefore, this sentence is covered by criterion 27 and is redundant here.

pollution constitutes an infringement of Blue Flag criteria. To ensure the integrity of the Blue Flag, the flag must be temporarily withdrawn, and information posted on the Blue Flag information board at the beach.

Emergency phone numbers for the police, first aid, and other relevant emergency numbers, along with the contact details for emergency services in the event of an oil or toxic chemical spill, must be posted at the beach, preferably on the Blue Flag information board.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

Criterion 30. There must be management of different users and uses of the beach so as to prevent conflicts and accidents.

Beaches that support multiple activities must have management plans to prevent accidents and conflicts. This must include [individual use](#)⁶ zoning for swimmers, [fishers](#), surfers, wind surfers and motor craft. At the same time, recreational use of the beach must be managed without negative impact on the natural environment or the biodiversity of the beach, and with consideration for aesthetic issues.

Swimmers should be protected from all sea craft (motor, sail or pedal). Where necessary, zoning through the use of buoys, beacons or signs must be in place. The same must be done for surfing areas. Distinctions should be made between motor, paddle or sail craft. The use of these various activities must be separated.

Powerboats and powered craft should operate at least 100-200 meters away from the swimming area. The exact distance is to be determined by the local regulatory authority. Furthermore, patrons who operate powered craft must be provided with guidelines regarding the use of their craft and the location of different zones.

The relevant authority or designated persons, for example lifeguards, must enforce the zoning of the different recreational areas in the water. Different activities on the beach must also be clearly marked and zoned.

Consideration must also be given to potential noise impact from various activities (motorized activities, stereos and kites, etc.).

If special temporary events are to be held on the beach then these should take place outside of the main swimming areas. If special activity events prevent the beach from complying with any of the Blue Flag criteria, then the flag must be withdrawn for the duration of the event. When such an event takes place, users of the beach must be notified through public warnings at the beach and, preferably, in the local media prior to the event. See Appendix I for guidelines for events on Blue Flag beaches. [Temporary events must not interfere with the site's compliance to the American's with Disabilities Act accessibility standards.](#)⁷

The beach itself must be managed in accordance with an environmental plan that protects sensitive species and habitats at the beach. This can be achieved through zoning or other preventative actions. In some cases, it may be necessary to restrict, disperse or otherwise manage certain activities. Beaches with sensitive dune or other habitats must be managed in such a way as to protect these sensitive habitats, e.g.

⁶ Clarifies that multiple activities cannot occur in the same area.

⁷ Added to emphasize that events should not disrupt normal operation and access to the beach should be maintained, especially in instances of public events.

protective fences. Recreational activities must be managed to prevent environmental degradation, e.g. coastal erosion or damage to vegetation, as well as to prevent birds and other wildlife, e.g. breeding turtles, from being disturbed.

Some particularly sensitive sites may require careful planning and management. In such cases, evidence must be provided to show that recognized local conservation organizations or groups have been approached and that a management plan has been drawn up.

Besides the use of physical separation of the different users, zoning must be clearly indicated on the map on the Blue Flag information board and information could also be given at access and entry points (see Criterion 5).

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

Criterion 31. There must be safety measures in place to protect users of the beach and free access must be granted to the public.

The public must have access to Blue Flag beaches without being a client of a certain hotel or beach club. Access to the beach should preferably be free, although at some beaches public access is provided through charging a small and reasonable fee (no more than 30 US dollars a day).

Access to the beach must be safe. Beaches that are physically challenging must have facilities for safe access, e.g. secured steps with handrails. Similarly, there must be designated pedestrian crossings on busy roads in the vicinity of the beach.

Beach promenades and steps onto the beach must be complete and in good condition. The car park surface must be in good order. Parking places reserved for the use of disabled persons must be available and must be clearly marked. See Criterion 22 for information related to parking on the beach. Other access paths must also be safe, with regulations for cars and bicycles. Bicycle paths should be encouraged whenever relevant.

Where promenade edges are higher than 2 meters above the beach, warning signs and/or a barrier must be in place to prevent accidents. This is especially important where the beach surface is rocky. Consult criterion 33 regarding access for people with physical disabilities.

Visitors to the beach should be safe while on the beach. Users with limited abilities should be allowed to utilize necessary means of recreation as long as these means are not endangering other beachgoers.⁸

Information about safety must be readily available. The times of availability of lifesaving services and first aid must be clearly marked on the Blue Flag information boards or at the lifeguard station. In addition, an explanation of the emergency flag system, if in use, must be provided.

If needed, adequate security must be available at the beach in the form of trained and qualified guards responsible for patrolling. The guards must wear easily identified uniforms and should be able to present their license as trained security personnel on request.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

⁸ Included to further protect users with limited abilities.

Criterion 32. A supply of drinking water should be available at the beach.

There should be a potable water source within walking distance of the Blue Flag awarded site at the beach, e.g. from a fountain, pipe, tap, etc. This source can be in the restroom/toilet block or on the beachfront, and it must be protected from contamination by animals. The source must comply with accessibility standards set forth in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

GUIDELINE CRITERION

All regions

Criterion 33. At least one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and facilities provided for people with limited abilities~~the physically disabled~~.⁹

It is strongly recommended that all Blue Flag beaches have facilities ~~designed for accessibility that allow access by the physically disabled~~, granting people with limited abilities ~~them~~ access to the beach, surrounding buildings and features, and the restroom facilities. It is a Blue Flag requirement that at least one beach in every municipality must provide these facilities. It is a Blue Flag recommendation that at this beach, if possible, there is at least one beach access route provided to the high tide level (tidal beaches), mean high water level (river beaches), or normal recreation water level (lake, pond, and reservoir beaches), as applicable. ~~access to the water for the physically disabled.~~

Access to the beach must be facilitated by access ramps or other surfaces that are firm and stable, designed for users with various disabilities. It is recommended that the ramp/pathway design and surface material fit the natural environment and, wherever possible, environmentally friendly materials are used, i.e. recycled composite plastics.

Facilities must be designed for wheelchair use and other ~~disabled~~ users with limited abilities and should comply with the ~~Americans with Disabilities Act: Standards for Accessible Design, or Architectural Barriers Act: Accessibility Standards¹⁰ ISO Standard Code for Access~~. The beach must comply with national regulations regarding access and facilities for people with disabilities. In addition, parking areas must have reserved spaces for accessible ~~disabled~~ parking. If access ramps or pathways cannot be provided due to the topography, e.g. at steep cliffs, the local authority must apply for a dispensation for this criterion.

If none of the Blue Flag beaches in a local authority can provide access and facilities that are accessible to individuals with limited abilities ~~for the disabled~~, a request for a dispensation for this criterion must be documented in the application.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION

All regions

⁹ This language is more inclusive and provides for a range of ability.

¹⁰ These are the federally enforceable regulations and the best practices specifically for beach accessibility documents in the US.