

# BLUE FLAG BEACH CRITERIA AND EXPLANATORY NOTES 2014



## INTRODUCTION

The Blue Flag programme for beaches and marinas is run by the international, non-governmental, non-profit organisation FEE (the Foundation for Environmental Education). 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, Blue Flag has become a truly global programme with an ever-increasing number of countries participating in the programme.

The Blue Flag programme promotes sustainable development in freshwater and marine areas. It challenges local authorities and beach operators to achieve high standards in the four categories of: water quality, environmental management, environmental education and safety. Over the years, the Blue Flag has become a highly respected and recognised eco-label working to bring together the tourism and environmental sectors at local, regional and national levels.

The explanatory notes given in this document make up the common and shared understanding of the Blue Flag beach criteria and the requirements for the implementation thereof. The explanatory notes provide details on the measurement and management of compliance with the Blue Flag beach criteria.

The criteria are categorised as either imperative or guideline. Most beach criteria are imperative, i.e. the beach must comply with them in order to be awarded Blue Flag accreditation. If they are guideline criteria, it is preferable that they are complied with, but not mandatory.

It must be emphasised that the Blue Flag beach international criteria in this document are the minimum criteria. A national operator can choose to have stricter criteria to what is outlined here.

These beach criteria and explanatory notes are to be used by all Blue Flag applicants in order to understand the requirements that must be met before a beach can receive Blue Flag accreditation. For guidance purposes, this document should also prove valuable for the management of those beaches already accredited with Blue Flag status. The beach criteria and explanatory notes also serve as a guide for the National, Regional and International Blue Flag Juries when making decisions about a Blue Flag beach candidate.

During the Blue Flag season the flag must fly at the beach. The flag is both a symbol of the programme being run at the beach but also an indication of compliance. The flag may either be flown 24 hours a day during the Blue Flag season, or only during the hours when the beach meets all the Blue Flag criteria. In the case of the former, there must be adequate signage indicating the time when services (eg life-saving), and facilities (eg toilets) are in operation.

If a beach that has Blue Flag accreditation does not comply with the Blue Flag criteria, the flag may be permanently or temporarily withdrawn from the beach. There are several degrees of non-compliance:

1. A **minor** non-compliance is where there is a problem with only one criterion of minor consequence to the health and safety of the beach user or to the environment. When minor compliance occurs and can be immediately rectified, the flag is not withdrawn and

the non-compliance is only registered in the control visit report. If however, a minor compliance cannot be fixed immediately, the beach is given 10 days in which to comply fully with all criteria. The flag is withdrawn until all problems are rectified and it is noted on the Blue Flag homepage.

2. **Multiple non-compliances** relates to non-compliance of two to three criteria but of minor consequence to the health and safety of the beach user or to the environment. When multiple non-compliances occur, the beach is given 10 days in which to comply fully with all criteria, the flag is withdrawn until all the problems are rectified and the homepage is updated accordingly.
3. **Major** non-compliance is where the beach does not comply with one or several criteria, the result of which can have consequence to the health and safety of the beach user or to the environment, as well as the general perception of the beach and therefore the Programme. When met with major non-compliance, the flag is withdrawn immediately and for the rest of the season. The site is registered as 'withdrawn' on the Blue Flag homepage, and the beach information board should clearly indicate that Blue Flag status has been withdrawn.

In all cases of non-compliance, the National Operator must immediately inform the local authority/beach operator about the observed areas of non-compliance. Information about the reason for a withdrawal of the flag must be posted clearly at the beach. The local authority/beach operator must inform the National Operator of re-compliance with the criteria and present the appropriate documentation needed. The flag can then be raised at the beach again. The National Operator should also consider a follow-up control visit to check that the beach does comply. In the event that the local authority/beach operator does not ensure and document re-compliance with the criteria within 10 days, the National Operator must ensure that the Blue Flag is withdrawn for the rest of the season at the beach.

In the event that conditions on the beach change and the flag has to be temporarily withdrawn, e.g. when climatic events cause damage to the beach or an emergency arises, the beach management must inform the National Operator that the flag has been temporarily withdrawn and the international website must be changed accordingly.

Apart from updating the Blue Flag homepage of the status of the beach, the National Operator must inform the International Coordination about the non-compliance. If the non-compliance is noted by an international controller, the National Operator has to give feedback to the International Coordination within 30 days.

The applicant for Blue Flag accreditation is the authority charged with responsibility for the beach. This may be a local municipality, private hotel, national park, or private beach operator. A beach may be eligible for Blue Flag accreditation if it is a designated bathing area and it has the necessary facilities and services to comply with the Blue Flag criteria.

A beach must be accessible in order to be eligible for Blue Flag accreditation. It is preferable that beach users be granted free access to a Blue Flag beach, i.e. to use the beach and its facilities without paying a fee. Blue Flag, however, recognises that at some beaches, e.g. private beaches, members of the public are charged a small, reasonable fee to access the beach. Other payments may be levied for services in the area, e.g. for parking or hiring of equipment.

FEE, and the National Operator in a country, reserves the right to refuse or withdraw Blue Flag accreditation from any beach where the local authority/beach operator is responsible for violations of national environmental regulations or otherwise acts in discord with the objectives and spirit of the Blue Flag programme. Blue Flag beaches are subject to announced and/or

unannounced control visits by FEE International.

In the event of a first-time applicant, the applicant local authority/beach operator must provide evidence in the application that the beach complied with the imperative water quality criterion for Blue Flag in the season (or year) prior to application for full status. Applications will only be considered from beaches where a minimum of 20 samples have been taken in the previous season(s).

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION AND INFORMATION**

Each beach must have at least one Blue Flag information board in place containing all the information as required by the criteria listed below. For long beaches it is recommended to install more than one Blue Flag information board (approximately one every 500 metres). 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 programme and other FEE eco-label must be displayed.**

Information about the Blue Flag programme 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 furthermore 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 programme.

Contact details for the local, national and international Blue Flag representatives should 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 flag is temporarily withdrawn, information must be posted at the beach informing the public as to the reasons why the flag was withdrawn.

Blue Flag beaches and marinas must promote the Green Key programme as another eco-label FEE programme with a message such as: "Along with the Blue Flag, the Foundation for Environmental Education also develops another eco-label for accommodations: Green Key. Find more information at: [www.green-key.org](http://www.green-key.org)"

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

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

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

- increasing the awareness of, and care for, the local environment by recreational users and residents.
- training personnel and tourist service providers in environmental matters and best practice methods.
- 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 programme and other FEE programmes (YRE, LEAF, Eco-Schools and Green Key).

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

There must be at least five different activities offered in 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 education activities should be effective and relevant, and each year, the local authority should 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 promoted in good time to inform the public about these opportunities. Such activities could also be promoted on the Blue Flag information board, in other areas in the beach area, in local centres, 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 be an updatable list posted at the kiosk or clubhouse, an SMS service or other means of communication. Whatever the platform for dissemination is, it has to be stated on the information board where to find out more about the activities.

Local authorities/beach operators are encouraged to implement and/or support sustainable development projects in which public participation is a key element, e.g. Local Agenda 21 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 education 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.org](http://www.blueflag.org)).

*Appendix C provides further background on the environmental education activities.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

Bathing water quality information must be displayed on the Blue Flag information board. It is recommended that a table or figure with easily identifiable symbols that correspond to the results be used. The information should 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 posts 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 4. Information relating to local eco-systems and environmental phenomena must be displayed.**

The aim of this criterion is to ensure that beach users are well informed and educated about relevant environmental phenomena (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.

Where appropriate, 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 should 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 should at least be a short notice on the board informing the public about the nearby sensitive area 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

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 should be of good quality, easy to read and properly orientated.

Pictograms should preferably be used.

The required map elements (where applicable) should show the location of:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| - "You are here" pointers                          | - authorised camping sites at/near the beach                          |
| - lifeguards or lifesaving equipment               | - recycling facilities  |
| - the area patrolled (for beaches with lifeguards) | - location of water sampling point(s)                                 |
| - first aid equipment                              | - access points and access for disabled persons                       |
| - telephones                                       | - zoning (swimming, surfing, sailing, boating, etc.) where applicable |
| - toilets (including toilets for disabled people)  |   |
| - drinking water                                   |   |
| - car and bicycle parking areas                    |   |

- 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 natural sensitive areas, etc.
- direction (North)
- scale bar

For guidelines on the design and suitability of maps of Blue Flag beaches, visit [www.blueflag.org](http://www.blueflag.org).

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

The code of conduct should 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 issue concerned (i.e. a No Diving sign on a pier) or as information at the relevant sites. Internationally recognised symbols, e.g. pictograms should be used wherever possible.

The code of conduct should include rules about the presence of domestic animals, zoning, litter management, the use of vehicles, camping, fires, etc.

Laws 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

## **WATER QUALITY**

The Blue Flag programme 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-label 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 site and this 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 samples must be taken at these sites to provide evidence that such inflows do not affect bathing water quality.

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

### **How often a sample must be taken?**

There must be no more than 30 days between samples during the Blue Flag season. The Blue Flag programme does not accept applications from beaches, irrespective of the length of the Blue Flag season, where less than five samples have been taken. I.e. a minimum of five samples must be taken evenly spread out during the season. The first sample must be taken within 30 days before the official starting date of the Blue Flag season.

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 necessary to replace a 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 the 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 re-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 factors which can have a serious adverse effect on the quality of the bathing water, the beach manager must temporarily take down the flag and clearly state the reason on the information board. It is recommended that the wording of this information is along the lines: "This beach has recently experienced abnormal weather. Swimming is not recommended at this time due to the possibility of pollution."

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	



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

An independent person, officially authorised 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 accredited to carry out microbiological and physical-chemical analyses.

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

Water quality results must be given 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 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 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.

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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 9. No industrial, waste-water or sewage-related discharges should affect the beach area.**

A bathing water profile must be compiled for every Blue Flag beach. 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 assessment of the potential for cyanobacteria and algae formation.

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

Where identified, combined sewage overflow discharges or other urban/industrial waste water discharges are 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.

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 for the treatment and effluent quality given in the EU Urban Waste Water 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 waste-water or any 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

The microbiological parameters to be monitored are given below:

Parameter	Coastal and transitional waters Limit values	Inland waters Limit values
<b>Escherichia coli (Faecal Colibacteria )</b>	250 cfu/100 ml	500 cfu/100 ml
<b>Intestinal Enterococci (streptococci)</b>	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 programme requires 95<sup>th</sup> percentile compliance of the above limit values. This is in accordance with the EU Bathing Water Directive 2006 as well as the recommendation of the World Health Organisation. The percentile has to be calculated for each parameter and also met for each parameter. For example, if the 95<sup>th</sup> 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 pages of the Blue Flag homepage. All bathing water sample results should be entered into the spreadsheet and the percentiles will be calculated automatically. This sheet should be sent to the International Coordination with the application.*

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

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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 11. The beach must comply with the Blue Flag requirements for the following 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 odour detected. On land the beach must be monitored for oil and emergency plans should include the required action to take in case of such pollution.
- There has to be an absence of floatables such as tarry residues, wood, plastic articles, bottles, containers, glass or any other substance.

Immediate action should be taken if abnormal changes are detected. This includes abnormal changes in the colour, 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

## **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 Marine Protected Areas 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, and other stakeholders such as community representatives, special user groups, Marine Protected Area representative, 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.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All regions

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

Regulations pertaining to issues relating to coastal zone planning, environmental management, waste-water legislation, environmental legislation, and others must be met for the beach to receive and maintain Blue Flag status. The applicant must assure that the facilities and activities under its responsibility comply with these guidelines 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. The legislation may include regulations for land-use planning, sewage/industrial waste effluent discharge, environmental health regulations, 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.

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 that all buildings on the 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 environmental conservation regulations. The back beach area including dunes, paths, and parking areas must be properly maintained according to coastal zone management principles.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

#### **Criterion 14. Sensitive area management.**

Some sites at/near the Blue Flag beach may be very sensitive and require special management. In these cases, the beach operator is strongly encouraged to consult an appropriate conservation organisation 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 a 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 Marine Protected Area, it is necessary to consult with the MPA management in order to ensure compatible ecosystem conservation and biodiversity goals.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

The beach and surrounding areas including paths, parking areas and access paths to the beach must be clean and maintained at all times. 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, occasional mechanical sieving and deep cleaning of the sand should be done to remove small particles such as cigarette butts, etc.

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

When cleaning the beach, this must be done 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. The cleaning of Marine Protected Areas as well as sensitive areas (sand dunes, etc.), must be done in accordance with the laws and advice from the relevant authority.

For information about the management of algal waste and seaweed, refer to criterion 15.

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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 16. Algae vegetation or natural debris should be left on the beach.**

Algal vegetation is generally accepted as referring to seaweed. Seaweed and other vegetation/natural debris are natural components of both freshwater and marine ecosystems. These ecosystems must be considered as living and natural environments and not only as a recreational asset to be kept tidy. Thus, the management of seaweed or other vegetation/natural detritus on the shore should be sensitive to both visitor needs and biodiversity. Natural disposal by tides and waves at the beach is accepted, as long as it does not present a nuisance.

Vegetation should not be allowed to accumulate to the point where it becomes a hazard. Only if it is absolutely necessary should vegetation be removed, and then consideration should be given to disposing of it in an environmentally-friendly way, e.g. through composting or for fertilizer use. Wherever possible, environmental specialists should be consulted regarding the management of algal vegetation on the beach.

In some areas seaweed is dried on the beach for later use as fertilizer 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 users.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**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 litter-bins (preferably with covers) should be of a suitable design and appearance as well as functionality. 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 at which they are emptied should be increased 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

In the event that the community has a local recycling facility then 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.

On application, the local authority/beach operator must indicate whether the local authority has facilities for the recycling of waste. In the event that 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

The number of toilets/restrooms 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 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. There should also be facilities provided for disabled visitors (see criterion 32).

Toilet or restrooms facilities must be equipped with 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

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 of areas serviced by the municipal sewage system and/or 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 22. 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 about these restrictions displayed at the beach (as part of the code of conduct, Criterion 6).

Vehicles (except for those used for the purpose of cleaning and safety, e.g. for moving lifeguard equipment, or emergency vehicles) should not be allowed on Blue Flag beaches. For cases, however, 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 whenever the situation requires it, police or traffic guards must control the beach. If vehicles are allowed they should be prohibited from entering the high water zone at any time. The majority of the beach should be designated entirely vehicle-free.

Where there are no physical barriers preventing access to the beach by vehicles and where there are problems with unauthorised vehicles, camping or dumping, bylaws should be put in place to prohibit these activities. Information about these by-laws should 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 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	



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

On Blue Flag beaches, dogs and pets are permitted in the parking areas, on walkways and promenades in the back beach area only - if permitted by the beach authorities as well as local and national legislation. Animals in these areas must be controlled. It is recommended that a Dog-Free Zone be created to prevent dogs and other animals from entering the main beach and swimming area - this excludes guides dogs for the visually impaired.

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 should be managed and systems should be in place to remove stray animals from the beach. Measures should also be put in place to prevent access to the beach by stray animals. In the event that 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 as to this fact. It is also recommended that information be displayed informing the public what to do should stray animals be seen on the beach.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

Consideration should 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 design 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 should 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.

To prevent access by the public, all construction work or hazardous structures must be fenced off. In the event that 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 should not impact on beach users.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**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 metres from any part of a Blue Flag beach, a monitoring programme must be established to monitor the health of the habitat (coral reef or sea grass beds) at least once a season.

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

The “Reef Check” Coral Reef Monitoring Programme could be used. *See Appendix H for further details of the Reef Check monitoring system.*

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions where applicable.	

**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 organise traffic and reduce the peak traffic periods.
- develop pedestrian access.

The Blue Flag programme 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All regions

## **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 legislation regarding beach safety.

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 authorities or where applicable by a Full Member organisation of the International Life Saving Federation (ILS), see appendix I.

The public safety control measures as recommended by the safety risk assessment should be implemented in 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. Lifeguards should only be employed for life-guarding and not in combination with duties such as water sports, rentals and services, cleaning or other duties.

Lifeguards must be easily recognisable. It is therefore recommended that lifeguards wear the

internationally recognised red/yellow uniform. Lifeguards must be provided with appropriate lifesaving equipment.

Bathing areas patrolled by lifeguards should be clearly marked out. The area should 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 few<sup>1</sup> users public rescue equipment can replace lifeguards, unless the national legislation or the safety risk assessment states otherwise.

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 should 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 metres 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 of the Blue Flag information boards.

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. An explanation of the beach safety flag system in use must be provided.

The lifesaving equipment must include access to an emergency phone, unless the risk assessment states otherwise. The equipment should be regularly inspected and must 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	GUIDELINE 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 lifeguard on site, and/or b) an attended first aid station with trained personnel, and/or c) equipment located in a shop or other beach facilities at the beach, and/or d) 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.

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 for easy

---

<sup>1</sup> Few = Over a period of 4 weeks in the high season there are on average less than 50 beach users per day

location by beach visitors (including on the map on the Blue Flag information board). See Criterion 5. In addition, the time in which first aid is available must be clearly informed.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

The emergency plan should cover 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 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. The:

- identification of 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 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 or 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. If there is any infringement of Blue Flag criteria, and to ensure the integrity of the Blue Flag, the flag must be temporarily withdrawn and information posted on the Blue Flag information board or at the beach.

Emergency phone numbers for the police, first aid, and 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	GUIDELINE 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 zoning for swimmers, surfers, wind surfers and motor craft. At the same time, recreational use of the beach must be managed without negatively impacting the natural environment, 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, beacon or signs should be in place. The same should be done for surfing areas. Distinctions should be made between motor craft, paddle or sail craft. The use of these various activities must be separated.

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

The relevant authority, 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 should also be given to potential noise impacts from some activities (motorised activities, stereos and kites).

If special events are to be held on the beach then these should be located outside of the main swimming areas. 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. When such an event takes place, users of the beach should 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.*

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 habitats must be managed in such a way to protect these sensitive habitats, e.g. 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 recognised local conservation organisations 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 should 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	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

**Criterion 31. There must be safety measures in place to protect users of the beach.**

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.

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 should 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 21 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 metres 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 criteria 32 regarding access for people with physical disabilities.

Visitors to the beach should be safe while on the beach. 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 licence as trained security personnel on request.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

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

There should be a potable water source at the beach, e.g. from a fountain, pipe, tap, etc. This source can be in the restroom/toilet block or on the beachfront but it must be protected from contamination by animals.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
	All regions

### **Criterion 33. At least one Blue Flag beach in each municipality must have access and facilities provided for the physically disabled.**

It is strongly recommended that all Blue Flag beaches have facilities that allow access by the physically disabled granting them access to the beach, surrounding buildings, 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 access to the water.

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

Facilities should be designed for wheelchair and other disabled users and should comply with the ISO Standard Code for Access. The beach must comply with national regulations regarding access and facilities for people with disabilities. In addition, parking areas should have reserved spaces for disabled parking. In the event that access ramps 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 for the disabled, a request for a dispensation from this criterion must be documented in the application.

IMPERATIVE CRITERION	GUIDELINE CRITERION
All regions	

## **APPENDIX A: Dispensation cases**

All imperative criteria have to be complied with in order to obtain the Blue Flag. In the event of discussions arising out of the National Jury processes and if an applicant has failed to fulfil the imperative criteria, the National Jury could forward a beach to the International Jury as a dispensation case. In the case of an application requiring a dispensation, the National Jury must forward the case to the International Jury with the necessary background documentation and an explanation as to what imperative criteria have not been fulfilled and giving reasons as to why a dispensation is requested.

Dispensation cases may arise when a beach has exceeded the required limit values because of a known, documented incident during the bathing season. Dispensation cases argued on the basis of incidents considered unusual but not atypical of the site are not considered.

The most frequent request for dispensation is caused by exceptional/extreme weather conditions impacting on compliance with the water quality criteria. A National Jury can in such cases give a dispensation to omit a sample if the national authority's controlling bathing water quality regulation has officially approved such a dispensation. Furthermore, an official statement from national weather authorities stating that the weather was exceptional must accompany the request for dispensation.

For EU-member countries: if the request for dispensation of omission of a sample has been approved by the European Commission, and written proof of the European Commissions' approval is provided to the International Coordination, then the case is not considered as a dispensation case.

If an incident of high levels of pollution can be attributed by way of documentary evidence to other issues, such as an accident or another unavoidable incident, it is also possible to forward to the National Jury such a candidate as a dispensation case. The documentation must show that the problem has been rectified and that the pollution was undoubtedly linked to the incident in question.

A beach can apply for dispensation when:

- facilities are under construction at the time of the application but will be finished by the start of the season.
- owing to extreme weather conditions, the imperative criteria on the beach not being met, e.g. signage or walkways, access to the beach has been damaged, etc. However, these must be in place by the start of the season.
- a beach is not accessible by the physically disabled yet it is the only beach in a local authority to run the Blue Flag programme. The beach must present a plan for how and when the beach can fulfil the criterion as a central part of the dispensation application.
- the location of the beach is such that the distance from services renders it unable to meet an imperative criterion, e.g. an accredited laboratory.



## **APPENDIX B: Information about the Blue Flag programme must be displayed.**

**[Criterion 1]**

### **THE BLUE FLAG PROGRAMME**

This beach has been given Blue Flag accreditation. 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 quality, environmental information and education, safety, service and facilities.

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.

#### **Facts about the Blue Flag:**

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.

The Blue Flag is an environmental award for beaches and marinas. Only local authorities or private beach operators can apply for a 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. Blue Flag accreditation is only given 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 litter-bins on the beach - and recycle waste if possible

Use public transport, walk or rent a bike to get to the beach

Obey the beach code of conduct

Enjoy the nature of the beach and its surroundings, and treat it with respect

Choose a holiday destination that cares for its environment - and an environmentally friendly hotel too, if possible. Along with the Blue Flag, the Foundation for Environmental Education also develops another eco-label for accommodations: Green Key. Find more information at:

[www.green-key.org](http://www.green-key.org)

#### **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 contacts. It will assist the programme, if you could report on how these beaches comply with the Blue Flag standards. In this way you can help ensure that the Blue Flag standard continues to be met."

## **APPENDIX C: Guidelines for Environmental Education Activities.**

**[Criterion 2]**

### **Types of Activities**

There must be a mixture of different types of environmental educational activities for different user groups. Some activities must be carried out at the beach and have a direct focus on the beach or coastal environment. 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 for marine beaches, diving/snorkeling orientation sessions, beach inspections, photography or drawing contests, nature reconstruction projects, green technology projects, "Adopt a Beach" programmes, community coastal monitoring programmes, etc.

Training 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 target a wide range of different groups. It is important that the local authority, 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 work together with local NGOs in setting up educational activities.

**Information about Activities**

Information about the publicly accessible activities must be made available at the beach 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 local authority as part of the standard management of health, safety, transportation or tourism

**APPENDIX D: Recommendations for presenting water quality information on Blue Flag beaches. Example of a coastal water beach:  
[Criterion 3]**

**Beach:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Contact person:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Local authority:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Telephone no:** \_\_\_\_\_

Date												
<b>Escherichiacoli / Faecal coliform</b>												
☺ < 250cfu/100ml												
☹ >250cfu/100 ml												
<b>Intestinal Enterococci / Faecal streptococci</b>												
☺ <100/100 ml												
☹ >100/100 ml												

<b>Blue Flag and bathing water quality</b>		<b>What do the results mean?</b>	
<p>This beach has met the Blue Flag water quality standards. The bathing water is continuously monitored for the different types of bacteria shown in the tables. The bathing water is tested at least every 30 days. In the table you can see when the water has been analysed and how many bacteria were found.</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.</p>		<b>Faecal coliform / E.coli</b>	<b>Faecal streptococci / Intestinal enterococci</b>
		☺ Below 250	☺ Below 100
		<i>Excellent bathing water</i>	
		☹ Above 250	☹ Above 100
		<i>Is allowed a few times during the season</i>	

## **APPENDIX E: the 95th percentile**

The 95th percentile is a calculation method used to obtain the average amount of pollution. In terms of Bathing Water sampling results, the value shows the results that are less than or equal to the limit values 95% of the time. The standards refer to values that would be exceeded less than 5% of the time.

The 95th percentile is derived through the following calculation (based on the explanation in the EU Bathing Water Directive 2006):

1. Take the log10 value of all bacterial enumerations in the data sequence to be evaluated. Zero values cannot be used and should be replaced by a value of 1 (or the minimum value allowed)
2. Calculate the mean of the log10 values ( $\mu$ )
3. Calculate the standard deviation of the log10 values ( $\sigma$ )
4. The upper 95 percentile is derived from the following equation:  $\text{antilog}(\mu + 1,65 \sigma)$
5. The resulting value must be within the limit values as stated above

A calculating spreadsheet is available on the Blue Flag homepage under the Internal Pages as per January 2010.

## **APPENDIX F: Beach Litter Measuring System – a method of mapping the status of litter on a beach** [Criterion 15]

In order to determine the cleanliness on the beach, the Beach Litter Measuring System could 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 100m<sup>2</sup> (10m x 10m) for your bulky litter count and photo (Choose the dirtiest 100m<sup>2</sup> 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 1m<sup>2</sup> for your fine litter count and photo (choose the dirtiest area within the 100m<sup>2</sup>)
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.

## APPENDIX G: Reef Check system for coral reef monitoring

[Criterion 25]

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>.

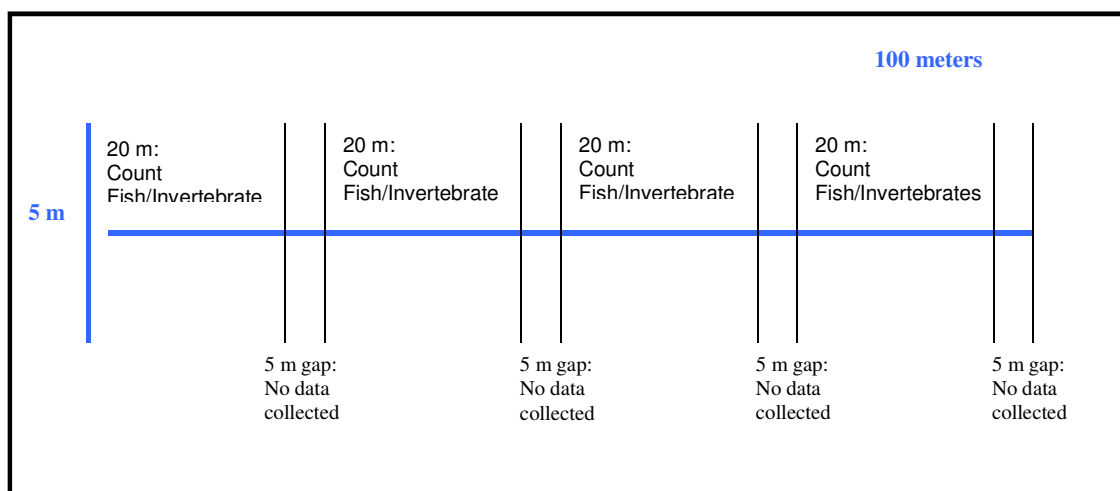
“Reef Check” is designed for use by volunteer non-scientist snorkelers or scuba divers. A local “Reef Check” team should be established with a scientist and a group of snorkelers and divers trained to carry out the analyses. The team members must be skilled at identifying the indicator organisms and 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 metre depth) and mid-reef (6 - 12 metre depth). Reefs in many areas are however not suitable for monitoring at more than one depth.

A 100 metre transect should be established (preferably parallel to the shore). The transect must be divided

into 4 x 20 metre observation areas divided by 4 x 5 metre 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. 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 litter 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.

## **APPENDIX H: Guidelines for events on Blue Flag beaches**

**[Criterion 30]**

Should events be planned for Blue Flag beaches, it is recommended that the local authority/beach operator attempt to find a win-win situation in both hosting the event and maintaining Blue Flag status. Events on Blue Flag beaches are not incompatible with the management of the Blue Flag programme. However, the event should not compromise Blue Flag standards. The Blue Flag should not be dropped simply because an event is planned on the beach.

The decision to allow events to take place on beaches is ultimately the decision of the local authority/beach operator managing that facility and would, as such, be guided by local by-laws and other legislation. Should the local authority be concerned as to potential impacts on Blue Flag standards, early contact and discussion with the National Operator is recommended. It is reiterated that it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that Blue Flag standards are met.

If necessary, additional resources, e.g. cleaning staff, portable toilets, etc should be brought in to ensure that the standards do not drop.

Wherever possible, the Blue Flag area should be zoned (this to include the use of buoys – where appropriate – in the water) so that a designated Blue Flag swimming area is still retained and the beach can still fly the flag. It is not recommended that the whole beach be designated to the event.

Wherever possible, every attempt should be made to ensure that all the Blue Flag standards are still met on the beach during the event.

In terms of the criteria of Blue Flag, compliance with all environmental and building legislation also applies to any events and/or the construction of facilities on the beach. This includes the possibility of undertaking Environmental Impact Assessments or producing environmental reports on the impact of the event on the natural surroundings. In this case, permission from the relevant environmental authorities in the region would be necessary.

The public must be given advance warning of any events planned for Blue Flag beaches. This could be in the form of posters or other information at the beach, through announcements in the local media, or on local authority/beach operator websites if appropriate. A notice indicating details of the event, duration of the event, where more information can be obtained, where complaints can be made, etc. must be posted at the beach.

In the event of an activity that takes place on the beach after hours, i.e. for those beaches that withdraw the flag at the end of the day when criterion are no longer being met, the beach operator/local authority must ensure that the beach and the facilities be cleaned and returned to order, before the flag is due to be raised the next morning, even if this means the cleansing teams must work through the night to ensure that the beach is clean once the flag goes up. So, if the flag is normally raised at 08h00 in the morning, the facilities must meet Blue Flag standards by 08h00 in the morning.

It is recommended that the local authority/beach operator consider a fee to be levied on the organisers of events hosted on Blue Flag beaches and that this income be used to make improvements to the beach or within the local area.

## **Appendix I – Guidance on ILS Safety Risk Assessment for Beaches [Criterion 27]**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The International Lifesaving Federation (ILS) is the world authority in the global effort to prevent drowning and works with national life saving organisations to improve drowning prevention, water safety, water rescue, lifesaving, lifeguarding and lifesaving sport. FEE and ILS have therefore entered a Memorandum of Understanding where FEE recognises ILS as being the world authority in the global effort to prevent drowning.

FEE encourages national organisations and local authorities to work with ILS national organisations when possible.

ILS will undertake risk assessments all over the world and take care that the information boards according to ISO 20712 are placed at as many beaches as possible. When this is not possible, an independent risk assessment may be conducted. Below are guidelines produced by ILS.

### **BACKGROUND**

Risk management can be defined as a logical and systematic approach of identifying, analysing, assessing, treating, monitoring and communicating risks associated with any activity or process. In its *Guidelines for safe recreational water environments (Vol.1)* the World Health Organization states: 'Assessment of hazard and risk inform the development of policies for controlling and managing risks to health and well-being in water recreation. ... The assessment of a beach or water should take into account several key considerations including:

- the presence and nature of natural or artificial hazards
- the severity of the hazard as related to health outcomes
- the availability and applicability of remedial actions
- the frequency and density of use
- the level of development.

### **PRINCIPLES**

The purpose of hazard and risk assessment is to assess the probability that certain events will take place and assess the potential adverse impact these events may have on people, property or the environment or other adverse outcomes.

ILS sees the implementation of risk assessments for all aquatic locations as a key element of the strategies to reduce injury and loss of life or other adverse impact in the aquatic environment.

A generic framework and the main elements of the risk management process identified are:

- Communication and consultation
- Establish the context
- Risk identification
- Risk analysis
- Risk evaluation
- Development of a risk control measures plan
- Monitor and review

This framework is consistent with the international standard ISO 31000 – Risk Management – Guidelines on principles and implementation of risk management.

The basic rationale for conducting a risk assessment is:

1. Identify the hazards of a particular location and assess the risks of possible human interaction with the hazard.
2. Provide the basis for a risk management plan
3. Improve safety and reduce the risk of death or injury at the location

4. Ensure the best use of resources and encourage effective management and cost effective operations
5. Reduce the potential for litigation stemming from accident and management practices
6. Provide guidance for the development of policy, procedure and practices.

A **hazard** is a source of potential harm or a situation with a potential to cause a loss.

A **risk** is used to describe the probability that a given exposure to a hazard will lead to an adverse outcome.

The job of accurately analysing the potential personal risk to the public at a coastal and beach location is complex. The determination and evaluation of potential risks is made more complicated in coastal regions due to the continually changing nature of the environment. Coastal regions are dynamic environments where the presence and level of a potential danger varies with numerous factors such as time, water conditions, weather and human interaction.

In order to effectively assess hazards and their associated risks, the assessor must understand all the contributing factors that go together to create the danger, for example the beach topography, the prevailing weather and wave climates, and the number of people who use the beach and their chosen activity.

Consideration is required to treat (control) and manage the risks to ensure visitors can enjoy the safest aquatic recreation possible. Solutions may include any one or combination of the following “hierarchy of controls”.

1. Removal of risk; hazards, people or both, where possible (Elimination).
2. Remove access to the location at which the hazard may present a risk (Isolation).
3. Share the risk with another party or parties through for example contracts, partnerships or insurance (Transfer).
4. Install a barrier such as a fence or vegetation (Engineering control).
5. Management (Administrative) controls that may include:
  - a. Community education programmes to raise awareness of potential hazards.
  - b. International standard signage to ISO 20712 will enable visitors to make informed decisions on whether they wish to proceed into an area or undertake a particular activity.
  - c. Supervision through the deployment of appropriately trained personnel such as lifeguards.
  - d. Implementation of appropriate emergency management systems.
  - e. Use and appropriate siting of public rescue equipment such as life buoys/rings.
  - f. Zoning, such as use of marker buoys and flags to define areas in which non-compatible activities should be conducted such as power boats, swimming and sailing
6. Retain and management of the risk (Residual risk).

## REFERENCES

International Life Saving Federation (ILS), 2007, ILS Beach Risk Assessment Policy  
 International Life Saving Federation of Europe (ILSE), 2007, ILSE Risk Assessment Guidelines  
 International Life Saving Federation of Europe (ILSE), 2010, ILSE Designated Bathing Area Risk Assessment Report  
 International Standards Organisation (ISO), 2008, ISO 20712 Water Safety Signs and Beach Safety Flags (Parts 1, 2 & 3).  
 Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), 2007, *A guide to coastal public rescue equipment*  
 World Health Organisation (WHO), 2003, *Guidelines for safe recreational waters Volume 1 - Coastal and fresh waters*