

Chapter 18: Blue Flag strategy

1. Introduction

The Blue Flag is a leading voluntary international eco-certification programme, owned and managed by the Danish-based Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). The Blue Flag is awarded to municipalities for beaches and marinas which meet strict criteria addressing water quality, environmental education and information, environmental management and safety.

1.1. History

The concept of the Blue Flag was developed in France in 1985, where coastal municipalities were awarded the Blue Flag after meeting certain sewage treatment and bathing water quality criteria. In 1987 FEE proposed the concept of the Blue Flag to the European Commission, leading to the launching of the Blue Flag programme as one of the community activities. Gradually the programme was adopted in a number of countries outside Europe, including Morocco, Tunisia, New Zealand, Brazil, Canada and the Caribbean. In 2001 South Africa became the first county outside Europe to be awarded the Blue Flag.

1.2. Blue Flag in the City of Cape Town

In South Africa, the Blue Flag programme is managed by the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA). The implementation of the Blue Flag beach programme is carried out by participating local authorities and marina managers along the coast of South Africa.

The City of Cape Town's (City) inaugural participation in the Blue Flag programme was in 2003, with three beaches, namely Bikini, Mnandi, and Clifton 4th, awarded Blue Flag pilot status and subsequently achieving full status in 2004. Since then, the City's Blue Flag programme has grown steadily and by 2013 eight City beaches and two marinas were participating in the Blue Flag programme, namely Bikini beach, Camps Bay beach, Clifton 4th beach, Llandudno beach, Mnandi beach, Muizenberg beach, Silverstroom Strand, Strandfontein, False Bay Yacht Club and the Granger Bay Water Club.

2. Vision and Aims

To position the City as a leading coastal destination through the provision of world-class recreational beach amenities, by:

- Ensuring close alignment with the vision and criteria of the international Blue Flag programme;
- Ensuring strict compliance with Blue Flag criteria as established by FEE and as enforced by WESSA;
- Expressing the City's commitment to the Blue Flag through:
 - Promoting and facilitating community involvement and benefit;
 - Providing a safe and healthy environment;
 - Ensuring the protection of the natural coastal environment;
 - Promoting the City's coastline and its beaches as a major tourist attraction; and
 - Promoting the City's coastline as an important contributor to its economic prosperity.

3. Blue Flag Season

The City's Blue Flag season falls within the main summer holiday period – the Blue Flag season starts on 1 December and ends on 31 March each year.

WESSA requires that the duration of a Blue Flag season for a municipality or beach exceeds one month. This being said, the City may deviate from its four month schedule where it deems necessary, based on availability of capacity and resources, beach user trends, climate and season considerations. As such, Llandudno has a two month season (1 December to 31 January) , while Silwerstroom has a one month season (1 to 31 December).

4. Features of a Blue Flag beach

In order to offer beach users a complete and satisfactory experience, the City strives to ensure the provision of key facilities and services, including, but not limited to those indicated here. These facilities and services ensure the implementation of and compliance with the Blue Flag Criteria, as administered and enforced by WESSA.

4.1. Facilities and equipment

- First aid equipment and facilities;
- Visible appropriate signage, including the Blue Flag Information Board, displaying a beach map, water quality results, rules and regulations and contact details for information and emergencies;
- Blue Flag and WESSA flags;
- Appropriate lifesaving flags;
- Special parking for emergency vehicles;
- Parking for people with disabilities;
- Wheelchair ramps (where possible – at least one beach in the municipality must provide a wheelchair ramp);
- Well-managed ablution facilities, to include a baby-changing station and soap and paper towel dispensers;
- Appropriate and safe, well-managed ablution facilities for people with disabilities;
- Information centre;
- Lifeguard facility;
- Law Enforcement office; and
- Beach Manager's office.

4.2. Services

- Water Quality: Weekly bathing water quality monitoring (according to set Blue Flag Criteria) and on-site display of up-to-date water quality results on the Blue Flag Information Board.
- Security: Deployment of security guards or law enforcement officers.
- Safety: Deployment of qualified and well-trained (according to Lifesaving South Africa's standards) lifeguards. If deployment of lifeguards is not possible, then the provision of on-site lifesaving response kits is acceptable.
- Beach Wheelchairs: Provided at beaches with the appropriate and necessary infrastructure in accordance with the City's Operational Manual for the Use of Beach Wheelchairs.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1. Cooperative Governance

The City's Blue Flag programme is led by the Sport, Recreation and Amenities Department (SRA). In order to ensure compliance with Blue Flag criteria and requirements, SRA enlists the services of other City line functions, through the signing of Service Level Agreements with such line functions. In addition to City line functions, SRA facilitates the provision of lifesaving services through collaboration and partnership with Lifesaving Western Province.

5.2. Specific Services

5.2.1. Sport, Recreation and Amenities Department

- Lead City's participation in Blue Flag, including compilation and submission of Blue Flag application forms, introduction of new beaches to the Blue Flag programme, convening of Blue Flag Committee meetings;
- Coordinate and ensure all necessary services are provided by relevant line functions;
- Provide the necessary facilities and signage;
- Serve as the central point of communication with respect to City Blue Flag matters;
- Ensure and facilitate the provision of lifeguards;
- Where law enforcement is not available, deploy private security guards;
- Provide the necessary beach management staff, including seasonal staff.
- Pollution abatement and incident management at Blue Flag beaches

5.2.2. Solid Waste Management

- Ensure a high-standard waste management programme according to a set waste removal schedule;
- Provide a waste-removal schedule to beach managers, outlining the following:
 - waste removal from beach and parking areas;
 - removal of beach-cast kelp;
 - that the following shifts are adhered to: 7h00 – 15h30; 12h00 – 20h00
- Removal of dead animals.
- Ensure a high standard of waste removal within the local contributing catchment

5.2.3. Scientific Services

- Collection and testing of water samples;
- Interpretation of data;
- Making water quality results available to beach managers;
- Maintenance of water quality datasets;
- Provide annual training for beach management officials.

5.2.4. Law Enforcement

- Maintaining a visible presence during Blue Flag hours, 10h00 – 18h00;
- Ensuring officers report for duty during the set Blue Flag season and hours;
- Ensure that all officers are appropriately identifiable and are equipped with the necessary tools and equipment.

5.2.5 Environmental Resource Management

- Designing an environmental education and information programme for the City's Blue Flag beaches and marinas each year;
- Compiling a budget and ensuring the resourcing of the budget;
- Ensuring programmes are rolled out in accordance with Blue Flag requirements;
- Promoting, participating in and/or advising on ongoing public awareness campaigns with respect to Blue Flag and responsible beach amenities utilisation.

5.2.6. Lifesaving Western Province

- Ensuring the provision of well-trained, certified lifeguards to Blue Flag beaches, in accordance with Blue Flag requirements;
- Facilitating and ensuring lifeguards are equipped with all the necessary lifesaving equipment;
- Ensuring lifeguards are present on Blue Flag beaches, during Blue Flag season, from 10h00 until 18h00;
- Upon request, presenting lessons on safe and responsible beach use, during environmental education and information programmes.

5.2.7. Tourism Department

- Provide co-funding and support for the running of the Blue Flag EE programmes on the eight beaches each season.

6. Beach Selection Process

The City must aspire to manage all its public recreational beaches to standards espoused by Blue Flag. It is acknowledged that, due to limited resources, all recreational beaches cannot participate in Blue Flag. Where the City considers introducing a new beach to the Blue Flag programme, a process based on a set of guidelines must be followed.

6.1. Guidelines for selection of a new beach

6.1.1. Spatial distribution

- a) The City must strive to accomplish an even spatial distribution of Blue Flag beaches along its coastline;
- b) The spatial distribution of Blue Flag beaches must promote the equitable accessibility to all its communities; and
- c) The spatial distribution of Blue Flag beaches must be seen to enhance the economic integrity of the area in question.

6.1.2. Water quality

- a) The Blue Flag programme lists water quality as the overriding criterion for the selection of a candidate;
- b) ii) The City's routine coastal water quality monitoring programme must be used as a guideline when selecting a candidate beach; and

- c) iii) The geographical location of the beach must take into account logistical feasibility for the practicable, viable and sustainable collection and delivery of water samples for water quality testing.

6.1.3. Strategic Planning

- a) To grow the Blue Flag programme, a steady, cautious and systematic approach must be followed;
- b) ii) Before selecting a candidate beach, the City must be satisfied with the management of the beaches already participating in the Blue Flag programme; and
- c) iii) After five years, the City must assess its performance with respect to the management of Blue Flag beaches.

7. Operational performance monitoring

7.1. Minimum Standards

In addition to complying with the Blue Flag Criteria, in order to ensure a successful Blue Flag programme, during each Blue Flag season, the City must strive towards maintaining the following minimum standards:

- Zero forced lowering of the Blue Flag by WESSA;
- Zero permanent withdrawal of the Blue Flag status by WESSA;
- Zero public misconduct incidences, especially alcohol-related incidences;
- Zero drowning incidences during Blue Flag hours – 10h00 to 18h00;
- Maintain a Level 1 cleanliness standard; and
- Provide at least five environmental education and information programmes per Blue Flag beach.

7.2. Control Measures

In order to meet the above-mentioned minimum standards, the City must implement the following control measures:

- Convene a Blue Flag pre- season meeting with all participating line functions and services;
- Conduct a Blue Flag pre- season inspection, in accordance with the Blue Flag Checklist (Annexure 1);
- Convene monthly Blue Flag Committee meetings during the Blue Flag season – that is, 1 December to 31 March;
- Conduct surveys to gauge the public's opinion of and attitudes towards the City's Blue Flag programme; and
- Conduct research on economic viability, opportunities and benefits for each beach, once every five years.

Annexure A: Blue Flag Beaches and Marinas 2013/14

