

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## **House Bill Sets Cruise Ship Discharge Limits**

### **Alaska Would Hold Ships to Nation's Toughest Water Standards**

(JUNEAU) – In a comprehensive effort to protect Alaska's marine environment and the economic, subsistence and recreational users that depend on it, the House Finance Committee today introduced legislation to give Alaska the strictest cruise ship wastewater discharge standards in the nation.

House Bill 260 is designed to ensure that the clean oceans so crucial to the Alaska economy and lifestyles will not be degraded by the hundreds of cruise ships plying Alaska waters each year, said Rep. Eldon Mulder (R-Anchorage), co-chair of the House Finance Committee.

"We Alaskans are envied worldwide for the pristine beauty of our natural environment, and I'm proud to sponsor legislation keeping us in the forefront of environmental protection," Mulder said. "In House Bill 260, Alaska establishes its own discharge standards, demands the cruise ship industry monitor and report on its compliance, and requires it to pay the costs of making sure the clean waters folks come north to enjoy remain clean for other visitors and for all Alaskans for generations to come."

One of the nation's most popular cruise ship destinations, Alaska welcomes cruise ships that will bring in an estimated 680,000 passengers this year on hundreds of port calls. As "floating cities" that can carry 1,000 or more passengers, these ships produce hundreds of thousands of gallons of greywater, such as shower runoff, and blackwater, or human waste, each day.

Recent revelations that some ships have been releasing unacceptably high level of effluent in and near state waters has forced federal regulators to acknowledge that current regulations are inadequate. U.S. Sen. Frank Murkowski of Alaska recently won passage of federal law that authorizes, but does not yet impose, stricter discharge standards.

"We have met with industry leaders, other legislators, the governor and members of the public to negotiate a collaborative approach to environmental protection," said Mulder. "We have developed a plan to ensure the state has the information it needs to monitor discharge, to ensure compliance with these standards, and to impose significant sanctions if these standards are not met. I'm confident we've come up with a practical, effective and affordable solution."

(MORE)

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House Bill 260 would take effect this summer, and establish a rapid compliance schedule requiring all cruise ships entering Alaska waters to meet the new state standards within two years. The bill would also:

- Establish clear limits barring discharge of wastewater with fecal coliform bacterial count of more than 200 colonies/milliliter, or with more than 150 milligrams/liter of suspended solids – the same as authorized under the recent federal legislation
- Set clear penalties for failure to comply, including fees of from \$500 to \$100,000 for a first violation, and up to \$10,000 for each day a ship remained in violation
- Require ships to record and report their discharges to the Department of Environmental Conservation
- Ensure public accountability by requiring the Department of Environmental Conservation to report these findings to the Legislature
- Authorize a fee of about \$1 per cruise ship visitor, to fund a “Coastal Protection Fund” which would pay the state’s costs of monitoring both water and air discharges quality, and for some remediation of any discharge
- Authorize the state to develop monitoring regulations and, if appropriate, grant variances in exceptional circumstances
- Complement and reinforce the new federal discharge legislation

HB 260 imposes vessel registration and reporting requirements similar to those in another bill already introduced this legislative session, as well as penalty and program fee provisions in a bill suggested by the governor. The Finance committee’s bill builds on the strengths of those bills, but goes beyond them to give clear assurance to the cruise ship industry and to Alaskans that the Legislature is second to none in its commitment to preserve the state’s environment.

“It is not enough to just pile up data documenting the fouling of Alaska’s oceans, and it’s not enough to set minor penalties that unscrupulous ships might simply accept as a cost of doing business,” Mulder said. “This legislation is a comprehensive package that establishes clear standards, sets out clear and substantial penalties for failure to comply, and requires the industry itself to bear the cost.”

“Clean oceans and pure water are critical to Alaska, not just to the visitor industry, but to everyone in the state,” he said. “We must be able to assure Alaskans that the waters they count on for their job, their subsistence lifestyle, their recreational activity or their spiritual renewal are protected. House Bill 260 will go a long way towards providing that assurance.”

HB 260 was referred to the House Finance committee.

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**Broadcasters note:** Comments are available on the Majority Actuality Line 1-800-478-6540  
**Attachment:** Spreadsheet showing comparison of HB 260, HB 22, and HB 183