

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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## **Cruise Ship Compromise Sails Through House** **HB 260 Sets Discharge Limits, Independent Monitoring, Testing**

(JUNEAU) – The House passed landmark environmental legislation today to ensure that cruise ships operate in Alaska waters under a comprehensive new wastewater monitoring program that will give the state the strictest discharge standards in the nation.

House Bill 260 will reassure Alaskans that the ships can continue making a positive contribution to Alaska's economy, while preserving the clean marine environment that Alaskans rely on for jobs, recreation and sustenance, said Rep. Eldon Mulder (R-Anchorage), co-chair of the House Finance Committee, which introduced it.

“What we saw with HB 260 represents a triumph of the public process,” Mulder said. “The concerned parties all came together and worked hard to deliver an environmental protection bill that is second to none. We may have weathered some rough seas along the way, but by working together we got a bill that protects Alaska's critical need for a clean environment, as well as ship operators' desire for fair and defensible discharge standards.”

As passed by the House, HB 260 would:

- Require ships to register annually with the state and hold them to strict state standards that bar discharge of water with fecal coliform bacterial count of more than 200 colonies/milliliter, or with more than 150 milligrams/liter of suspended solids – the same standards authorized by new federal legislation
- Set clear penalties for failure to comply, including fines of from \$500 to \$100,000 for a first violation, and up to \$10,000 for each day a ship remained in violation
- Allow officials with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to directly oversee mandatory monitoring testing of sink runoff (graywater) and blackwater (sewage) by independent third parties
- Require the independent laboratories performing test sample analysis to provide the results to the DEC, to ensure public accountability
- Provide for negotiated rulemaking to set additional standards for limiting other discharges

(MORE)

- Allow all stakeholders to participate in negotiated rulemaking to set state standards limiting discharge of other hazardous materials, including fecal coliform, ammonia, residual chlorine, acidity, chemical oxygen demand, biochemical oxygen demand, total suspended solids and other pollutants
- Require ships to test and report on onshore discharge of any hazardous materials
- Direct ships to pay a fee of about \$1 per cruise ship passenger to fund a “Coastal Protection Fund” which would pay the state’s costs of monitoring both water and air discharge quality, and for some remediation of discharge
- Allow emergency exemptions to the standards only when justified by threats to the passenger or vessel safety, or when alternative treatment techniques might result in even cleaner discharge
- Take effect July 1, 2001

The final version of the bill resulted from a compromise that combines the most important elements of various legislative initiatives supported by the Republican Majority, the Democratic Minority, the Knowles administration, cruise ship lines, and committed members of the Alaska public, Mulder said.

“This represents a pioneering achievement in ensuring that a growing part of the visitor industry doesn’t adversely affect the environment people come here to enjoy,” Mulder said. “It became possible due to the willingness of a lot of people to come together in an atmosphere in which we could work toward a positive resolution we could all support.” He credited the achievement to:

- Rep. Beth Kerttula, who has devoted years of hard work to the issue and shared the benefits of her hard-won expertise with all parties
- House Speaker Brian Porter, whose leadership helped win a commitment from all parties to keep working until the job was done
- Cruise ship lines, who have worked with public officials to find ways to mitigate the impact of their ships on Alaska waters, including development of state-of-the-art technologies
- Governor Tony Knowles, who clearly established this matter as a high priority issue for him and his administration

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 graywater, such as shower runoff, and blackwater, or human waste, each day.

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.

“Clean oceans and pure water are critical to Alaska, not just to the visitor industry, but to everyone in the state,” said Mulder. “The compromise we have reached in House Bill 260 will go a long way towards making sure Alaskans and visitors alike can trust that our marine environment will remain clean for generations to come.”

HB 260 passed by a vote of 35-3, and moves to the Senate for consideration.

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**Broadcasters note:** Comments are available on the Majority Actuality Line 1-800-478-6540