

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

House and Senate Majorities

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Legislature Passes Discharge Restriction Bill

(JUNEAU) - The Alaska Legislature passed a bill today that built on existing federal regulations to protect Alaska's waters.

"Senator Frank Murkowski worked very hard on behalf of the people of Alaska and passed a bill in Congress last year that solved our most pressing marine cruise ship environmental concerns: it prohibited the dumping of untreated sewage in Alaska's waters and set minimum standards for the discharge of treated sewage and graywater," said Speaker of the House Brian Porter (R-Anchorage). "With this law in place, there was no 'environmental crisis' that warranted calling this special session that cost the people of Alaska in excess of \$125,000."

The federal law placed the following restrictions on cruise ships that carry more than 500 people:

- Outlawed the dumping of untreated sewage anywhere in Alaska's waters, including the "donut holes," areas within Alaska's waters that fall under federal control because they are more than three miles from shore on all sides
- Set limits for the content of discharged sewage, outlines the conditions under which treated sewage may be discharged within Alaska's waters and provides for both regular and surprise ship inspections and discharge testing to ensure adherence to the regulations
- Set effluent limits for graywater discharge, and outlines the conditions under which graywater may be discharged within Alaska's waters
- Requires the self-reporting of illegal discharges and provides stiff fines and penalties for such discharges

House Bill 260, sponsored by the House Finance Committee, creates a layer over the federal regulations, extending the laws to smaller cruise ships and some of the state's ferries. The bill also allows the state to set effluent limits for discharged sewage and graywater, perform waste water testing and receive reports of discharge content from both state and federal sampling.

"The bill passed by Congress and House Bill 260 both have wastewater sampling, testing and record keeping requirements, and the federal guidelines will go into place this season," said Sen. Pete Kelly (R-Fairbanks). "While HB 260 makes improvements on the federal legislation, the cruise ship industry had agreed to voluntarily comply with those standards, eliminating the need to pass this bill this summer."

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Broadcasters' Note: An excerpt from Sen. Kelly's comments on the floor of the Senate is available on the Majority Actuality Line 800-478-6540.