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Voluntary Cruise Pollution Policy No Good for Washington Waters

Cruise industry has consistently violated promises not to pollute

After dumping 16,000 gallon of concentrated raw sewage into Washington's waters and then ignoring a mandate to burn clean fuels while docked in the Port of Seattle, the state Department of Ecology (DOE) is now trusting the cruise industry not to pollute by entering into a voluntary agreement to protect Puget Sound and coastal waters. The public will be given only two weeks to comment on the cruise ship pollution Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

"It's shameful that the public and the environment are being sold out so polluters can profit," said Teri Shore of Bluewater Network, a national environmental group based in San Francisco. "A handshake has never cleaned up an industry. Only strong and enforceable laws can protect the air and water from the pollution generated by these floating cities."

"An MOU is worse than nothing because it provides a false sense of protection," said Fred Felleman of Ocean Advocates in Seattle. "We need at least a monitoring and reporting law to find out where and when cruise ships dump. The fact that there is no consequence to breaking this agreement makes it meaningless."

While the proposed cruise pollution MOU is supposed to stop most cruise dumping, it contains no enforcement or penalty provisions. It asks for minimal monitoring and sampling, and relies heavily on guidelines from a cruise industry trade organization, which has never penalized a single ship for breaking them. The MOU was negotiated behind closed doors by the cruise industry and the Department of Ecology without input from stakeholders or the public—even though Bluewater Network and Ocean Advocates were granted intervener status by the state Pollution Control Hearing Board. Now the public is giving a scant two weeks to respond.

Last year the cruise industry violated an MOU in Hawaii 16 times, and a cruise ship was banned from Monterey Bay, CA, for disregarding a promise not to dump. Cruise ships also recently violated a city ordinance limiting the number of ships per week in Key West, FL, where city residents protested in the streets. In addition, the cruise industry paid \$50 million in environmental fines between 1998 and 2003 for violating various laws.

Even worse, the DOE joined the cruise industry in killing a cruise ship pollution bill (H3646) introduced by Rep. Mary Lou Dickerson in the recent legislative session, which would have mandated strong and enforceable cruise pollution measures. It was supported by fishers, environmentalists and Alaska legislators.

"Washington is selling out its responsibility to protect public waters," according to Gershon Cohen, Ph.D., of the Campaign to Safeguard America's Waters, "and the State Legislature should be passing an improved version of Alaska's cruise ship pollution law, rather than allowing an

industry with an abysmal track record of dumping and falsifying records to regulate its own behavior.”

"The MOU is not a reform of current practices - it is an entrenchment of the status quo which relaxes the demand for compulsory measures and sustained pressure for innovative implementation of clean technology. It is a cynical ruse which we will continue to expose until legislative safeguards are in place," said Howard Breen of Travel Just. "Our oceans are running out of time and we can ill afford to let current trends continue."

Cruise traffic into the Port of Seattle has jumped from six port calls in 1999 to more than 140 scheduled calls in 2004, following the opening of a new cruise terminal at Pier 30. No new environmental laws were put into place to prevent cruise ships from dumping or to monitor their discharges. Ships can legally dump treated sewage and oily water and untreated shower and laundry water into state waters.

“As tempting as it may be for a state to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the cruise industry, history suggests that this is not the best policy,” said Dr. Ross Klein, author of a report on MOUS. “If a state is concerned with protecting its environment, it has little choice but to choose a legislative route.”

The report, titled “The Cruise Industry History and Practices: Is a Memorandum of Understanding Effective for Protecting the Environment?” reveals the weakness of voluntary MOUs and the need for stronger protections. The report is available on Bluewater Network’s website, http://bluewaternetnetwork.org/reports/rep_ss_kleinrep.pdf

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