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EPA in Alaska

Protecting the Health of Our Home



At EPA Region 10, our mission is to protect and restore the environment of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska for present and future generations. We envision a future where government, industry, and citizens work together as stewards to preserve and improve environmental health for all species.

EPA has ten regional offices nationally, with a headquarters office in Washington, DC. Region 10 covers the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. Region 10's main office is located in Seattle, and additional offices are located in each state. In Alaska, EPA has offices in Anchorage, Juneau, and Kenai. These local offices work hand-in-hand with the EPA people in Seattle to carry out environmental work in Alaska.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, also called EPA, works to protect and promote the quality of Alaska's air, water, and land. This work includes pollution prevention, spill response and clean up, permitting, monitoring, enforcement of environmental laws, and more. EPA partners



with other federal, state, local, and Tribal governments—and with you—to cooperatively protect Alaska's environment.*

This brochure introduces you to some of the activities EPA undertakes in Alaska. It is not a complete

picture, but does provide an overview of some of the ways our agency is working to keep our environment healthy and safe.

*The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation is responsible for carrying out Alaska's safe drinking water, solid waste disposal, pesticides, and air quality programs.

PREVENTING POLLUTION

Avoiding the production of wastes altogether is far better than having to treat it. The *Pollution Prevention Act of 1990* seeks to avoid pollution in the first place by encouraging manufacturers to modify equipment and processes, redesign products, and make improvements in management techniques. Pollution prevention also involves waste minimization—recycling what we used to throw away. EPA has designed several nonregulatory, innovative pollution prevention programs that encourage participation from corporations, environmental groups, utilities, and governments. For example, the "Green Lights" program encourages widespread use of energy-saving light bulbs and fluorescent tubes, and the "Green Star" program promotes businesses which adopt environmentally supportive practices.

PREVENTING SPILLS

The *Oil Pollution Act of 1990* (OPA) strengthened EPA's ability to prevent and respond to catastrophic oil spills. In the aftermath of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989, OPA provided funding from oil taxes for the Oil Spill Recovery Institute to help research and prepare for any future spills. The tax also pays for response and cleanup when responsible parties are unwilling or unable to do so. Under OPA, EPA published regulations for above ground storage facilities. In Alaska, oil tanks are inspected and monitored as regularly as possible. EPA also helps ensure that underground petroleum storage tanks do not pose a risk to the environment.

Working with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Coast Guard, and the public, EPA also responds to spills of

hazardous materials. Under the authorization of the *Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act* (CERCLA or Superfund), EPA may complete emergency response actions when necessary. If there is a possibility of imminent public health risks, this response may call for a swift removal of the most dangerous pollutants spilled.

CLEANING UP THE LAND AND WATER

EPA is authorized by *Superfund* to clean up sites contaminated by hazardous wastes. EPA prioritizes clean-up activities; the worst areas get attended to first. Once any immediately dangerous material has been removed, the clean up is generally a more lengthy process than spill response. Affected communities are invited to participate in reaching decisions related to site cleanup activities. Currently there are 7 Superfund sites in Alaska which are listed on the National Priorities List, a list of the nation's most contaminated hazardous waste sites.

EPA also directly implements the *Resource Conservation and Recovery Act* (RCRA), the *Toxic Substances Control Act* (TSCA), and the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA) in Alaska. RCRA addresses generation, transportation, treatment, storage, and disposal of hazardous waste. Under TSCA, EPA has broad authority to regulate or ban the import, manufacture, use and disposal of most chemical substances in the United States. In Alaska, our focus is on assuring safe use and proper management of PCB's asbestos, lead in paint, and chemicals in commerce (including import and export of chemicals). EPCRA requires certain facilities to report on releases of listed toxic chemicals annually. Facilities also report pollution prevention and recycling data. EPA's Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) provides information on toxins in your community so citizens, businesses and governments can work together to protect the quality of the land, air and water.



PROTECTING OUR WATERSHEDS

Watersheds are nature's way of dividing up the landscape. Rivers, lakes, estuaries, wetlands, even the oceans can serve as catch basins for the land adjacent to them. Everyone lives in a watershed. Not only are our waters important for fish and wildlife habitat, they often provide areas for fishing, boating and other recreation, and may even be a source

of our drinking water. Sometimes they support agricultural irrigation and industrial operations. EPA often uses a permitting process to protect the surface waters in our watersheds. The *Clean Water Act* requires permits, called NPDES permits, to be in place before any pollutants are released to waterways from a discrete conveyance, or *point source*. Permits regulate the types and amounts of pollutants that can be released to a waterway. Discharges might include wastewater from activities such as mining, log transfer, oil development, and municipal sewage waste, for example.

Also of concern is contaminated runoff, often called "non-point" source pollution. Polluted runoff is now considered by many to be the leading cause of water pollution. Rain, sleet, and snowmelt wash off the land into our waterways, often picking up pesticides, fertilizers, petroleum products, animal wastes, and other pollutants. EPA provides technical and financial assistance to support state and local governments in their efforts to curb this type of pollution.

KEEPING WATCH OVER WETLANDS

Wetlands occupy a special niche between land and water, where plants and animals abound. Wetlands are valuable ecosystems, the "cradle of life" so to speak, providing habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife. They also help clean water by filtering it, and help control flooding. Section 404 of the Clean Water Act manages construction in wetlands. Permits for developing in wetlands are issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. EPA reviews and comments on these permits and retains veto authority.

MAINTAINING COMPLIANCE

Compliance with regulations is an important environmental protection cornerstone. Environmental enforcement is a comprehensive program involving federal, state, local, and tribal governments working together. When violations do occur, civil and criminal prosecution in courts, administrative orders, and other actions may be taken. Fairness and consistency are crucial; EPA is committed to requesting compliance from all citizens and businesses without exception, so that those who *are* complying with environmental regulations are not at a disadvantage because a competitor was not following the same rules.



EPA invites you to stay informed and get involved. For more information about any of the topics discussed in this brochure, or if you have questions, contact the appropriate person listed on reverse or call 1-800-424-4EPA.