



# Focus on **Cruise Ships**

from Ecology's Water Quality Program

## **Environmental issues and cruise ships**

Large cruise ships have operated out of Seattle since 1999 and the cruise business is one of the fastest growing business segments at the Port of Seattle. The Port has two berthing spots at Terminal 30 and one berth at Pier 66.

Although Washington State discharge regulations apply to cruise ships, the Department of Ecology (Ecology) has historically had little information on any environmental consequences from the cruise industry in Washington. This is due to the industry's regulatory status under the federal Clean Water Act. Because of the international nature of the cruise industry, cruise ships and their wastewater treatment systems have been excluded from many U.S. environmental laws and regulations that land-based industries are required to meet.

The U.S Coast Guard certifies that marine sanitation devices meet certain operational criteria for performance. It does not monitor discharges from the large ships. Most large ships follow the Cruise Lines International Association's *Cruise Industry Waste Management Practices and Procedures*.

### Memorandum of Understanding

Ecology and the NorthWest CruiseShip Association and the Port of Seattle signed a Memorandum of Understanding on April 20, 2004. The agreement covers the large passenger ships that are members of the NWCA. The goal of the agreement is to increase protection for Washington's marine waters from cruise-ship waste. The agreement bans all cruise-ship wastewater discharges (black and gray water), except from vessels with advanced wastewater treatment systems (AWTS) The agreement allows ships with AWTS to continuously discharge in Washington waters if these ships meet additional and more stringent engineering, monitoring and treatment requirements. The agreement also defines that waters subject to the agreement are consistent with Washington marine waters, requires sampling and allows for vessel inspections by Ecology.

In addition, the agreement provides that cruise ships:

- May discharge sludge from any type of wastewater treatment system only when a ship is more than 12 nautical miles from shore, and that discharges are specifically prohibited within a defined portion of the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary.
- Have a sampling regimen, with testing and reporting requirements, and it provides advanced notification and documentation from ships planning to discharge via an AWTS.
- Comply with Washington's more restrictive hazardous-waste laws, and do not dump garbage or oily bilge water beyond limits into state waters.

The agreement has been amended annually for clarifications following an annual meeting of the parties.

### **Results from the agreement**

Because of the MOU, Ecology is now allowed to board cruise ships and review their wastewater records. Since the agreement, Ecology learned of a Celebrity Cruises ship discharge of more than a half million gallons of untreated wastewater into Puget Sound and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Ecology learned of the ship's discharges during a September 2006 on-board inspection of the ship Mercury. In November 2006, Ecology fined Celebrity Cruises \$100,000 for the incident.



## **Benefits of agreement**

The cruise-ship agreement has resulted in several benefits to Washington's environment:

- We now have a water-quality strategy in place for large passenger vessels.
- We have a better understanding of the operational practices of the cruise industry. Ecology now has inspection capabilities, and the cruise industry has an increased understanding of the environmental concerns in Washington.
- We have forged a new and valuable partnership between state regulators, the cruise industry and other interested parties.

## **Limitations of the agreement include**

- Compliance is voluntary and enforceability is limited to those federal and state water quality laws that continue to apply to cruise ships.
- Not every cruise ship that travels through Washington's waters is covered under the agreement, either because it does not make a port call or because it's not a member of the NorthWest CruiseShip Association.
- Air quality issues are not covered by the agreement.

## **Background about cruise ships**

Cruise ships are typically categorized into large versus small. Large vessels accommodate overnight passengers for 250 or more. Small vessels accommodate 50-249 passengers overnight. Most of the large ships have a capacity of approximately 2,100 to 3,900 passengers.

Cruise ship companies that run regular cruises between Seattle and Alaska include Celebrity Cruises, Holland America Line, Norwegian Cruise Line, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., and Princess Cruises. These are all part of the NorthWest CruiseShip Association.

Alaska's Marine Highway runs regular cruises out of Bellingham to Alaska. The ships have a passenger crew capacity of about 175 to 225.

Some smaller cruise lines, such as CruiseWest and Linblad Expeditions run cruises on the Columbia and Snake River, the San Juan Islands, the Puget Sound as well as British Columbia and Alaska. These vessels typically have 150 passengers or less and may or may not run overnight cruises.

While we continue to learn more about the large passenger vessels, more information is needed about the small passenger ships including: which ships are operating in Washington water; what type of treatment systems are on board; which ships are discharging and where; and the quality of the wastewater being discharged.

Department of Health is currently studying how the on-board wastewater systems eliminate viruses and how to better protect shellfish in our waters.

Information regarding the memorandum can be found at:

[http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/cruise\\_mou/index.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/cruise_mou/index.html)

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