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Cruise Ship Pollution Lawsuit Seeks Action from U.S. EPA

Agency failed to respond to petition filed by 53 organizations in 2000; Cruise ships are still allowed to dump untreated sewage and other wastes directly into ocean

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Friends of the Earth filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency seeking an immediate response to a seven-year-old cruise ship pollution petition submitted in March of 2000. The petition, circulated by Bluewater Network (now part of Friends of the Earth) on behalf of 53 organizations, asked the EPA to assess and regulate pollution from cruise ships. The agency has still not responded. (*The complaint can be found [here](#). The petition can be found [here](#). Find related links below.*)

After issuing a cruise pollution white paper in August 2000 and holding public hearings in September 2000, the EPA abandoned the effort under the Bush Administration. Over the past seven years, calls for a national regime for regulating cruise ship dumping have been made by the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy and the Pew Oceans Commission with no action by the EPA.

"Our oceans are suffering and can't wait any longer," said Teri Shore, Campaign Director for Friends of the Earth. "Another record-breaking cruise ship season has started and the nation's waters remain at risk."

Professor Michael J. Robinson-Dorn of the Kathy and Steve Berman Environmental Law Clinic at the University of Washington, who prepared the case on behalf of Friends of the Earth, stated: "The lawsuit only asks the court to require the EPA to do what the law says it must: respond to Friends of the Earth's petition. Since this petition was first filed seven years ago, we've seen tremendous growth both in the cruise ship industry and in the research that shows the impacts from cruise ships on our nation's waters. Yet, the EPA has chosen to do nothing in response to this research, just as it has done nothing to respond to the Friends of the Earth petition."

Cruise ships are like floating cities. A typical one-week voyage with 3,000 people on board generates about 210,000 gallons of sewage, 1 million gallons of graywater and 37,000 gallons of oily bilge water (U.S. EPA). Under the Clean Water Act, wastewater treatment requirements for ships are limited and apply only near shore. Cruise ships can discharge raw sewage beyond three miles from shore, and no treatment of graywater is required anywhere. Treated sewage and oily bilge water can be released into

harbors, estuaries and coastal waters without monitoring. In contrast, landside dischargers of sewage need federal permits and must report daily on levels of pollutants in discharges.

The cruise industry has expanded by 107 percent over the past 10 years, (Cruise Industry News Winter 2006/2007) with no new national environmental protections. About 100 cruise vessels will carry more than 12 million passengers through North American waters this year (U. S. Maritime Administration).

Cruise ship size and capacity is expanding dramatically, with many ships now transporting 5,000 passengers and crew and the next generation of ships carrying as many as 8,500 passengers and crew.

Four of the 16 states with cruise ships calling on their ports have enacted their own laws (California, Alaska, Maine, and Hawaii). Cruise ships call on ports in Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Maine, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, California, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii.

Additional Links:

National Commission on Ocean Policy, Final Report, An Ocean Blueprint for the 21st Century, September 2004, See Chapter 16, Recommendations 16-5 and 16-6

http://www.oceancommission.gov/documents/full_color_rpt/16_chapter16.pdf

Pew Oceans Commission Report, America's Living Oceans, see P. 71

http://www.pewtrusts.org/pdf/env_pew_oceans_final_report.pdf

U. S. Maritime Administration, North American Cruises 4th Quarter 2006

http://www.marad.dot.gov/marad_statistics/2005%20CRUISE%20UPDATE/cruise%20report%200406.pdf

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