Comment Sought on EPA Cruise Ship Agreement

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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Bellevue, WA - The Washington Department of Ecology (Ecology), Port of Seattle (Port) and North West & Canada Cruise Association (NWCCA) are asking the public to comment on two proposed amendments to their eight-year-old environmental protection agreement. The NWCCA represents large cruise liners that operate between Seattle and Alaska from April to October each year. Ecology, the Port and NWCCA solicit public suggestions for possible additions or changes to the 2004 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) every three years. Ecology requested proposals for amendments in the fall of 2011. Two amendments met the criteria for consideration set by the MOU parties. They will decide whether to adopt the proposals after a 30-day comment period, which concludes on Feb. 13, 2012. Adoption of an amendment requires mutual approval by all three signatories.

The two amendments state:1) Ban the discharge of gray water and black water in MOU waters.2) Ban the continuous discharge of gray water and sewage (black water), limiting to only discharge while the ship is greater than 1 mile offshore and traveling at least six knots or more. "Black water" is sewage from toilets. "Gray water" is from other sources, such as showers, sinks, laundry and kitchens. Comments may be sent to Amy Jankowiak, Dept. of Ecology, 3190 160th Ave. SE, Bellevue WA 98008-0542, amy.jankowiak@ecy.wa.gov. Details on the amendments and the MOU are available on line at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/cruise_mou/index.html. Under the MOU, NWCCA member ships may only discharge wastewater in Washington waters with Ecology approval. To obtain approval, ships must show they use advanced wastewater treatment systems that meet the standards required in Alaskan waters. Ships may discharge only while under way at least a mile from berth and a half-mile from commercial shellfish beds, and when moving at six knots or faster. To discharge at berth, ships must have enhancements - approved by Ecology - that exceed Alaskan requirements. NWCCA members submit annual reports to Ecology on their ship's wastewater treatment performance. Ecology also conducts on-board inspections on NWCCA vessels. This information appears on-line after each cruise season at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/wastewater/cruise_mou/index.html. In addition to wastewater discharges, the MOU addresses solid and hazardous waste disposal and other environmental issues. In 2011, cruise ships made 195 calls at the Port of Seattle. Ecology's participation in the MOU supports the broader Puget Sound Initiative - a comprehensive effort by local, tribal, state and federal governments, business, agricultural and environmental interests, scientists, and the public to restore and protect the Sound, including the Strait of Juan de Fuca.