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Press Release COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – May 17, 2016

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DEC Announces Conference on Water Innovations for Healthy Arctic Homes

(JUNEAU, AK) — The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Village Safe Water Program announces the Conference on Water Innovations for Healthy Arctic Homes (WIHAH), scheduled September 18-21, 2016, at the Hilton Hotel in Anchorage, Alaska. The WIHAH conference will bring together Alaskan, U.S., and international engineers, health experts, researchers, community members, policymakers, and innovators to discuss the health benefits of household running water and sewer services in remote Arctic and sub-Arctic communities and how to make the delivery of these services more reliable, affordable, and sustainable.

This circumpolar conference is identified as an official event in conjunction with the U.S. Chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Along with the U.S. Department of State, other U.S. federal sponsors include the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the U.S. Arctic Research Commission.

Over 3,300 rural Alaska homes lack running water and a flush toilet. Residents in homes without running water and flush toilets have a significantly higher incidence of acute respiratory infections and severe skin infections than persons with in-home running water. A 2010 study found higher rates of invasive pneumococcal disease (IPD) for Alaskan children who did not have access to piped water. IPD is a very serious bacterial infection that can affect the brain, blood, and lungs. Residents of Southwest Alaska suffer rates of IPD that are among the highest in the world. Running water provides the ability to wash hands frequently, which reduces the incidence of disease by interrupting person-to-person spread of the germs that cause these types of illnesses.

The WIHAH conference will consist of expert speakers and poster presentations, along with sessions for selected innovative technical demonstrations. Additionally, the teams participating in phase three of the [Alaska Water and Sewer Challenge](#) will be pre-showcasing their prototypes developed as part of DEC's research and development effort to find alternative, more affordable methods for delivering drinking water and sewage disposal services to rural Alaska.

In order to ensure broad participation from different countries and areas of expertise, and because of space and cost limitations, attendance at the conference is by invitation only. Interested presenters should submit abstracts via the website by June 10, 2016. Individuals who want to attend the conference without giving a presentation are asked to submit an Expression of Interest by June 15, 2016. Types of presentations include 20 to 40 minute talks, posters, and exhibitions or demonstrations of an innovation. There is no registration fee.

Conference themes are scheduled to include:

- The importance of household water and sanitation in Arctic rural communities on human health
- Climate change impacts on water and sanitation infrastructure in the Arctic and sub-Arctic
- Innovative engineering approaches to increase access to water of adequate quality and quantity, including water reuse
- Methods of ownership, operations, and maintenance to maximize useful life of water and sewer systems in the Arctic and sub-Arctic
- Regulations and policies affecting access and cost of providing adequate quantities of water in the home

A conference proceedings publication and a summary report of the meeting will be produced.

For more information and to express interest in participating in the conference, please visit www.wihah2016.com.



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