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NEWS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 8, 2003

No. 03-164

Governor Discusses Environment Protection Successes

Goal is Enhanced Protection of Alaska's Air, Land, Water

(Ketchikan) –“Environmental protection is essential to successful resource development policies,” Governor Frank H. Murkowski said today during a visit to Ketchikan. “We can only create new jobs and a growing economy if we are responsible stewards of our environment. We are proud of our record of protecting Alaska’s environment, we are removing unneeded and burdensome processes, and we are seeing clear results.”

Murkowski said it is key to distinguish between substantive environmental measures, and unnecessary processes that don’t accomplish anything.

Speaking at a news conference at Ketchikan’s Ted Ferry Civic Center, and accompanied by his Commissioner of Environmental Conservation, Ernesta Ballard, the Governor provided a recap of sweeping protective environmental measures being initiated by his administration since taking office.

“The Governor’s agenda for improved environmental protection and more comprehensive regulation is aggressive,” Ballard said. Since taking office, Murkowski has:

- Added 13 new positions in DEC devoted to improving water and air permitting programs.
- Introduced successful contingency plan legislation to expand protection from catastrophic spills. The new law allows DEC to allocate more effort to on-the-water spill drills and field testing equipment to build reliable response skills.
- Implemented new regulations to vessels exceeding 400 gross tons and approved plans for cruise ships, ferries, log freighters, fish packers and private yachts requiring each vessel to be prepared to mount an immediate clean up and have guaranteed access to the necessary manpower and equipment. The Ketchikan based company Seapro plays a key role in this expanded protective program.

- Initiated complete redesign of Alaska's food safety program that relies on operator certification, restaurant specific risk assessment and risk management, and rigorous enforcement by DEC. Owners and operators will be held responsible for knowing how food becomes contaminated or spoiled and assuring that standard operating procedures protect their customers. This new program will provide equal protection from Nome to Barrow, Tok, Fairbanks and Wrangell.
- Funded important studies that will form the basis for better protection of public health including a study to measure the effects of exposure to diesel exhaust in rural Alaska. Human health studies of exposure to diesel exhaust from trucks and buses have caused EPA to require national conversion to ultra low sulfur diesel supplies by 2007. With this funding, DEC will gather necessary health information for rural Alaskans.
- Funded a fish monitoring study that is nearing completion to determine mercury levels in Alaska species. This study will provide Alaska specific information about the quality of Alaska's subsistence, sport caught and commercially harvested stocks.
- Approved complete overhaul of Alaska's water regulations to develop a comprehensive approach to groundwater, the source of drinking water for about 50% of Alaska's total population, and 90% of Alaska's rural population; a resource that is presently being inadequately addressed in state law.

Murkowski also said he is committed to adopting a mining rule that recognizes mining's characteristic impacts, such as the inevitable impact on groundwater of mine development, mine tailings disposal and mine wastewater treatment and discharge; and makes clear Alaska's regulatory authority.

Solid waste regulations are being revised, Murkowski said, to reduce the threat to groundwater from large accumulations of land-filled garbage. Water quality standards are also being reviewed, with one possibility being the development of new standards and permitting procedures to regulate discharges to groundwater.

"We have revised DEC's low-interest municipal loan program to allow communities to borrow for projects that address non-point sources of pollution such as storm water run-off, landfill leachate and harbor wastes," Murkowski said. "Seven communities have applied under the new guidelines, primarily to protect groundwater."

Finally, Murkowski announced he is seeking legislative approval for an important agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency.

"We are asking the next legislature for permission to assume full responsibility for regulating discharges to Alaska's waters such as those from municipal treatment work, factories, and mines," Murkowski said. "Permitting, compliance and enforcement should be done by Alaskans who are knowledgeable about Alaska and confident in applying national standards to Alaskan conditions."

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