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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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## **State of Alaska to Cleanup Highly Contaminated Junk Yard in Wrangell**

(WRANGELL, AK) – The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is initiating an immediate cleanup of an abandoned junkyard in Wrangell to prevent the risk of the public's exposure to contamination and the migration of the contamination to nearby Zimovia Strait and adjacent private lands. The State estimates 4,000 cubic yards of material may need to be removed from the junk yard.

"Our top priority is protecting public health and the environment," said Kristin Ryan, director of DEC's Division of Spill Prevention and Response.

The junk yard was in operation from the 1960s to the 1990s. Sampling of the area this year showed levels of lead and other metals, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs), pentachlorophenol (PCPs), polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon (PAHs), and other contaminants in the soil that raised human health and environmental concerns. The most dangerous concentrations of these pollutants came from incinerated, crushed, and emptied batteries, drums, and transformers. It is estimated that more than 1,500 automobiles were disposed at the junk yard. The City and Borough of Wrangell foreclosed on the property in 2009 for the nonpayment of taxes. It has restricted access and posted warnings that the shellfish harvested on the nearby beach may be contaminated from polluted water runoff from the junk yard.

"The community is very concerned about the contamination at the site, and it has been a huge eyesore," said Carol Rushmore, Zoning Administrator for the City and Borough of Wrangell. "We have been working with the State and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for several years to study and assess the site because we do not have the resources at the community level to deal with a site such as this. The only thing the city was able to do

with our limited budget was brush removal and to get a local contractor to remove most of the scrap metal for the value of the scrap. We are pleased the State is able to help us.”

Removal of the scrap metal was an important step towards addressing contamination at the site. It allowed for better soil sampling this summer, which was funded by EPA, and now enables the State to move quickly with cleanup work on the site. “We hope to have a contractor in place and begin work later this fall,” said Bruce Wanstall, DEC project manager for the junk yard site. “Because so much of the site is exposed to the elements, it is important to act now to control further spreading of the contamination.”

Wanstall characterizes the cleanup effort as a rapid response to the new information about contamination at the site and expects to have the bulk of the work complete by the end of next year.

EPA’s Federal On-Scene Coordinator at the site, Greg Weigel, explained that EPA had hoped to help with additional federal funds, but that funding hasn’t materialized. “We appreciate the State’s initiative and ability to secure the funding to tackle this cleanup. Alaska came through in a big way,” said Weigel.

Funding for the cleanup is coming from the Response Account in the State’s Oil and Hazardous Substance Release Prevention and Response Fund, which is available to DEC under Alaska Statute 46.08.040(a) to respond to pollution that poses an imminent and substantial threat to the public health or welfare, or to the environment.

“By law, we are required to try and find the responsible party and seek reimbursement for the cleanup costs incurred by the State,” said Ryan. “We have been working with the Department of Law to do this. However, in this case the original longtime owner is deceased. The subsequent owner abandoned the property and left the state and could not be found.”

For more information on the Wrangell Junkyard, visit the DEC Contaminated Sites Program web site at:

[https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/wrang\\_junkyard.htm](https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/wrang_junkyard.htm).

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