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State of Alaska finds more contaminated material than expected during Wrangell (Byford) Junkyard cleanup

(WRANGELL, AK) – The Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and cleanup contractor, NRC Alaska, discovered more contaminated soil at the Byford Junkyard cleanup site than previously anticipated. Excavation at the site uncovered more than four times the originally estimated volume of 4,000 yards of soil for treatment and disposal. NRC Alaska also found that contaminated material extends onto adjacent properties.

Metals, primarily lead, and petroleum hydrocarbons appear to be the predominant contaminants at the site. The contractor has rerouted surface water to a containment and treatment system at the site to stop the contamination from spreading. Excavation and treatment of all impacted soil and removal of debris will begin soon and proceed until completed in midsummer. Once the volume of treated material is known, options for final disposal will be pursued in late summer or early fall.

DEC contracted with NRC Alaska for up to \$3.6 million to stop pollutant migration and complete a cleanup. Because the former owners and operators of the junkyard are deceased, DEC accessed the Oil & Hazardous Response Fund to fund the cleanup and address the imminent and substantial risks to human health and the environment. The increased volume raises overall costs and DEC is seeking additional funding from the Response Fund and other potential sources to finish cleanup work at the site.

“Our top priority is to protect public health and the environment,” said Kristin Ryan, director of DEC’s Division of Spill Prevention and Response. “The high levels of lead found during the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) initial investigation are why we stepped in. This larger volume of contaminated material just confirms the immediate need to cleanup and address the exposure risks to the public from the site.”

“It is not unusual for us to learn more about a site once cleanup is underway,” said Bruce Wanstall, DEC project manager for the Wrangell site. “In this case, it was not until excavation that we understood that oily wastes, tires, engine parts, drums and batteries are buried across nearly all of the site down to the glacial till layer.”

The junkyard operated at the site from the 1960s-1990s and the contamination comes primarily from incinerated, crushed and emptied batteries, and drums. It is estimated that more than 1,500 automobiles were disposed of at the site. The site is currently owned by the City and Borough of Wrangell who foreclosed on the property in 2009. The City removed nearly all the surface scrap metal and other junk at the site. To help reduce the potential risk to citizens, the City has advised the community that the shellfish harvested on the nearby beach may be contaminated from polluted water runoff from the former junkyard.

For more information on the Wrangell Junkyard go to the DEC Contaminated Sites Program web site at: https://dec.alaska.gov/spar/csp/sites/wrang_junkyard.htm or visit the City and Borough of Wrangell’s website, <http://www.wrangell.com/community/state-dec-clean-former-byford-junkyard>.