

Villages fear trash overflow

by Warren Jarvis
for the Tundra Times

Recent additions to the international marine pollution treaty known as MARPOL mean many coastal Alaska communities may soon find themselves overflowing with garbage.

A provision of MARPOL that went into effect Dec. 31, 1988, prohibits the disposal of plastics at sea. The disposal of garbage within 25

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MARPOL requires all ports and some businesses involved in marine transport to accept ships' garbage. They must dispose of it in accordance with Environmental Protection Agency regulations.

To coastal communities, especially those with a large amount of ocean traffic, this will mean a marked increase in the volume of waste they must handle.

In fact, the situation already has reached crisis proportions in some communities, according to John Levy, executive director of the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference. The conference is a nonprofit economic development organization representing communities and businesses in Bristol Bay, Kodiak Island, the Aleutians and the Pribilofs.

The law is specific. Besides prohibiting the dumping of plastics at sea, it states that rags, glass, metal and paper, for example, may not be tossed overboard within 12 miles of land unless ground into pieces smaller than one inch. No waste of any kind may be dumped within three miles of land.

"They are good laws in that, yes, we need to stop pollution, and we need to clean up our act," Levy said. "But what is happening is that it is the communities that are bearing the brunt of it."

"For small communities that are strapped for funds, who have trouble processing or disposing of their garbage as it is, this is just going to really aggravate the problem for them."

Plastic makes up a smaller percentage of the waste received at the

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Alaska coastal villages from ships than the national average, Levy said. However, he added that the amount of fibrous material which fishing vessels, especially factory trawlers, use is more than enough to strain community disposal resources.

In a study of the roe herring and salmon fishing industries in the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference area, an estimated 11,000 cubic yards of solid waste was generated in 1988, only 2,000 cubic yards of which was plastic.

Levy said while burning the waste at extremely high temperatures might appear to be the ideal solution, it's not. That's because EPA emission requirements haven't been finalized yet, he said.

In addition, the EPA has cracked down on landfill requirements to the point that it would be almost impossible for most communities to open a new one, Levy said.

For a community such as Unalaska, with a landfill life of only three to five years remaining, stricter environmental regulations make an already difficult problem even more complex, he said.

Regardless of the method chosen, however, Levy said one of the impacts of the stricter regulations will be an increase in what people in the coastal communities pay for waste disposal.

While there has as yet been no commitment of government funds to solve the waste disposal dilemma, Levy said, the conference has received a \$75,000 grant from the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to study and propose solutions to the problem. A public meeting will be held Dec. 1 in Dillingham to decide how the money will be spent.

As of June 1, according to Chief Warrant Officer Victor Sarmaiento of the Coast Guard's Board of Operations Office, the Coast Guard has been enforcing a set of interim regulations.

The final regulations will go into effect early next year, Sarmaiento said, with the Coast Guard's main thrust this year being to educate communities about what is needed, as well as certify facilities.

The Coast Guard is currently processing about 25 applications for "Certificates of Adequacy," Sarmaiento said. Such a certificate is needed by any facility:

- Servicing oil tankers or vessels of more than 400 gross tons.
- Servicing ships carrying noxious liquids.
- Receiving more than 500,000 pounds a year of commercial fish products.

Civil penalties for violations are up to \$25,000 a day for each violation; criminal penalties, \$50,000 and five years imprisonment.