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Protecting The
World's Oceans

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Senator Lyman Hoffman
Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
State Capitol, Room 532
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Chairman Hoffman and Committee Members:

We strongly urge you to pass Senate Bill 27, an act relating to the manufacture, sale, and distribution of flame retardants and bioaccumulative toxic chemicals, out of the Senate Finance Committee. This legislation will help protect the health and safety of Alaskans and our precious marine resources by curbing the spread of Polybromodiphenyl ethers (PBDEs).

PBDEs fall into a class of pollutants known as persistent organic pollutants (POPs) that includes chemicals such as PCBs and DDT. POPs have gained widespread recognition in the past few decades for their toxicity and for the health risks they pose to both humans and wildlife. PBDEs, like many other POPs, are dangerous for three important reasons: they are able to travel long distances via atmospheric and ocean currents; once released into the environment they are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to remove; and they bioaccumulate, or increase in concentration, as they move up the food web.

Research conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in 2009 found that PBDEs are prevalent on nearly every coast line in the United States. PBDEs have been found in sediments and soils as well fish, shellfish, seals, sea lions, whales, porpoises, polar bears, and numerous land and sea birds. (NOAA, 2009) Several studies have documented high concentrations of PBDEs in humans in the United States, and over the last three decades, those concentrations seem to be increasing. NOAA's research found that those concentrations were anywhere from 10 to 100 times higher than concentrations found in Europe and Asia. (NOAA, 2009)

In Alaska, where many of us consume large quantities of fish and shellfish, and in some regions high-fat marine mammals, we are particularly at risk for exposure not only through the household goods in our homes, but also through the foods that we eat. PBDEs are a great cause for concern for Alaskans who rely heavily on fish and other marine animals to supplement and often sustain our diets,.

In order to protect the health and safety of Alaskans, as well as our valuable marine resources, the Senate Finance Committee should pass SB 27.

Sincerely,

Susan Murray
Senior Director, Pacific
Oceana

Reference: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. 2009. An Assessment of Polybrominated Diphenyl Ethers (PBDEs) in Sediments and Bivalves of the U.S. Coastal Zone.