

# Alaska State Legislature

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*Session: (Jan-May)*  
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## REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARRIS

### Sponsor Statement

#### **CS for House Bill No. 134 (RES)**

**An Act relating to terms and conditions of commercial passenger vessel permits for wastewater discharges**

The House Resources Committee Substitute for HB 134 represents a compromise to address the issue of permits for wastewater discharges from large commercial passenger vessels known as cruise ships.

In 2006, Alaska voters approved the cruise ship initiative that amended the law to require vessels to meet water quality standards at the point of discharge. Municipal wastewater systems and discharges from other commercial entities commonly use mixing zones, and smaller-sized vessels in Alaska are exempt.

In 2008, the Department of Environmental Conservation issued a general permit for all large cruise ships that provided a two-year period for vessels to meet standards at the point of discharge. DEC has also conducted a cruise ship technology conference on available treatments for discharges of ammonia and dissolved metals.

All sides on this issue agree that technology is unavailable now for onboard treatment of wastewater that allows vessels to meet all water quality standards at the point of discharge.

This bill addresses how the agency will permit wastewater discharges from vessels to allow for the time it takes to get the technology developed and installed onboard. It is important to keep in mind that cruise ships discharge cleaner wastewater than most municipalities, commercial entities, and all other Alaska vessels.

The House Resources Committee version of HB 134 establishes a reasonable compromise that will both protect Alaska waters and allow coastal communities the opportunity for cruise ships to stay in port longer.

**CS FOR HOUSE BILL NO. 134(RES)**

**IN THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA**

**TWENTY-SIXTH LEGISLATURE - FIRST SESSION**

**BY THE HOUSE RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**Offered:**

**Referred:**

**Sponsor(s): REPRESENTATIVES HARRIS, Kelly, Millett, Johansen, Foster, Keller, Chenault, Coghill,  
Johnson, Wilson, Muñoz, Hawker**

**A BILL**

**FOR AN ACT ENTITLED**

1 **"An Act relating to the terms and conditions of commercial passenger vessel permits for**  
2 **the discharge of graywater, treated sewage, and other wastewater; establishing a science**  
3 **advisory panel on wastewater treatment and effluent quality in the Department of**  
4 **Environmental Conservation; and providing for an effective date."**

5 **BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF ALASKA:**

6 **\* Section 1.** The uncoded law of the State of Alaska is amended by adding a new section  
7 to read:

8 **LEGISLATIVE INTENT.** It is the intent of the legislature that the minimum standards  
9 for the terms and conditions of wastewater discharge permits for large commercial passenger  
10 vessels meet all applicable state and federal effluent limits or standards, including Alaska  
11 Water Quality Standards, governing pollution at the point of discharge if the Department of  
12 Environmental Conservation, in consultation with its science advisory panel on wastewater  
13 treatment, determines that compliance with those limits or standards is the most  
14 technologically effective and economically feasible.

1     \* **Sec. 2.** AS 46.03.462(b) is amended to read:

2             (b) The minimum standard terms and conditions for all discharge permits  
3 authorized under this section require that the owner or operator

4                 (1) may not discharge untreated sewage, treated sewage, graywater, or  
5 other wastewaters in a manner that violates any applicable effluent limits or standards  
6 under state or federal law, including Alaska Water Quality Standards governing  
7 pollution at the point of discharge, except as provided in (e) of this section;

8                 (2) shall maintain records and provide the reports required under  
9 AS 46.03.465(a);

10                (3) shall collect and test samples as required under AS 46.03.465(b)  
11 and (d) and provide the reports with respect those samples required by  
12 AS 46.03.475(c);

13                (4) shall report discharges in accordance with AS 46.03.475(a);

14                (5) shall allow the department access to the vessel at the time samples  
15 are taken under AS 46.03.465 for purposes of taking the samples or for purposes of  
16 verifying the integrity of the sampling process; and

17                (6) shall submit records, notices, and reports to the department in  
18 accordance with AS 46.03.475(b), (d), and (e).

19     \* **Sec. 3.** AS 46.03.462 is amended by adding new subsections to read:

20             (e) When issuing, reissuing, renewing, or modifying a permit required under  
21 (a)(1) of this section, the department may include effluent limits or standards less  
22 stringent than those required under (b)(1) of this section for no more than two years  
23 duration if the department finds that a permittee is using methods of pollution  
24 prevention, control and treatment found by the department to be the most  
25 technologically effective and economically feasible in controlling all wastes and other  
26 substances in the discharge but is unable to achieve compliance with Alaska Water  
27 Quality Standards at the point of discharge.

28             (f) In developing an effluent limit or standard under (e) of this section, the  
29 department shall

30                 (1) require use of methods of pollution prevention, control, and  
31 treatment found by the department to be the most technologically effective and

1 economically feasible; and

2 (2) apply all other applicable provisions of state law and this section.

3 (g) When reissuing, renewing, or modifying a permit required under this  
4 section that was issued after the effective date of this bill section, the department may  
5 not include effluent limits or standards less stringent than the comparable effluent  
6 limitations in a previous permit issued under this section.

7 (h) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the authority of the  
8 department to

9 (1) restrict the areas in which discharges permitted under this section  
10 may occur; or

11 (2) impose additional terms and conditions on the manner in which  
12 discharges permitted under this section may be made in a specific area.

13 \* Sec. 4. AS 46.03 is amended by adding a new section to read:

14 **Sec. 46.03.464. Advisory panel on wastewater treatment; commissioner's**  
15 **reports to the legislature.** (a) A science advisory panel is established in the  
16 department. The panel consists of 11 members selected by the commissioner.  
17 Members of the panel serve without compensation but are entitled to transportation  
18 expenses and per diem as authorized for members of boards and commissions under  
19 AS 39.20.180. Each of the individuals the commissioner selects will serve for up to a  
20 five-year period and have expertise in the design, operation, or function of wastewater  
21 management and treatment systems; among the 11 panel members, the commissioner  
22 shall select at least one individual from each of the following groups:

23 (1) coastal community domestic wastewater management;

24 (2) cruise ship industry;

25 (3) commercial fishing industry; and

26 (4) a non-governmental organization with an interest in water quality  
27 matters.

28 (b) The panel shall

29 (1) meet at the call of the commissioner and give public notice of  
30 meetings of the panel as required under AS 44.62.310 and 44.62.312;

31 (2) hold one or more public conferences or workshops before 2012,

1 with at least one public conference or workshop to be held between January 1, 2012,  
 2 and January 1, 2014, if the department issues, renews, or modifies a permit required  
 3 under AS 46.03.462(a)(1) after January 1, 2012; and

4 (3) assist and advise the commissioner in conducting the analyses and  
 5 preparing the reports required in (c) and (d) of this section.

6 (c) On or before January 1, 2012, the commissioner, in consultation with the  
 7 panel, shall provide a preliminary report to the legislature that summarizes

8 (1) methods of pollution prevention, control, and treatment in use and  
 9 the level of effluent quality achieved by commercial passenger vessels;

10 (2) additional methods of pollution prevention, control, and treatment  
 11 that could be employed to provide the most technologically effective and  
 12 economically feasible measures to control all wastes and other substances in the  
 13 discharge; and

14 (3) the environmental benefit and cost of implementing additional  
 15 methods of pollution prevention, control, and treatment identified in (2) of this  
 16 subsection.

17 (d) On or before January 1, 2014, the commissioner, in consultation with the  
 18 panel, shall provide a final report to the legislature that includes the topics identified in  
 19 (c)(1) - (3) of this section.

20 \* Sec. 5. AS 46.03.465 is amended by adding a new subsection to read:

21 (h) On request, the owner or operator of a commercial passenger vessel  
 22 discharging wastewater under AS 46.03.462(b) shall provide the department with  
 23 information relating to wastewater treatment, pollution avoidance, and pollution  
 24 reduction measures used on the vessel, including testing and evaluation procedures  
 25 and economic and technical feasibility analyses.

26 \* Sec. 6. AS 46.03.464 is repealed.

27 \* Sec. 7. Section 6 of this Act takes effect June 1, 2014.

28 \* Sec. 8. Sections 1 through 5 of this Act take effect immediately under AS 01.10.070(c).

# FISCAL NOTE

**STATE OF ALASKA**  
**2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

Fiscal Note Number: 1  
 Bill Version: CSHB 134(CRA)  
 (H) Publish Date: 2/18/09

Identifier (file name): HB134-DEC-WQ-02-13-09  
 Title Cruise Ship Wastewater Discharge Permits  
 Sponsor Representative Harris  
 Requester House Community and Regional Affairs Committee  
 Dept. Affected: Environ. Conservation  
 RDU Division of Water  
 Component Water Quality  
 Component Number 2062

**Expenditures/Revenues** (Thousands of Dollars)

Note: Amounts do not include inflation unless otherwise noted below.

	Appropriation Required	Information					
OPERATING EXPENDITURES	FY 2010	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Personal Services							
Travel							
Contractual							
Supplies							
Equipment							
Land & Structures							
Grants & Claims							
Miscellaneous							
<b>TOTAL OPERATING</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

<b>CAPITAL EXPENDITURES</b>							
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<b>CHANGE IN REVENUES ( )</b>							
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**FUND SOURCE** (Thousands of Dollars)

1002 Federal Receipts							
1003 GF Match							
1004 GF							
1005 GF/Program Receipts							
1037 GF/Mental Health							
Other Interagency Receipts							
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>

Estimate of any current year (FY2009) cost: 0.0

**POSITIONS**

Full-time							
Part-time							
Temporary							

**ANALYSIS:** (Attach a separate page if necessary)

HB 134 has no fiscal impact on the Department of Environmental Conservation.

Prepared by: Lynn J. Tomich Kent  
 Division Water  
 Approved by: Dan Easton  
Deputy Commissioner

Phone (907) 269-7599  
 Date/Time 2/13/09 3:00 PM  
 Date 2/13/2009

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STATE OF ALASKA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
JUNEAU

March 19, 2009

The Honorable John Harris  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 403  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Harris:

Thank you for your letter requesting my help clarifying expectations for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) should your legislation, known as HB 134, pass the Legislature and become law. I share your confidence in DEC's abilities and efforts, and agree that DEC officials are working hard to implement the best treatment technology as quickly as possible.

I would like to assure you, and anyone else interested in this issue, that in the event that this legislation passes, DEC will retain the ability to preserve and protect water quality through their existing permitting authority. While discharge permits could be modified to include mixing zones where appropriate, cruise ships would still have to obtain and comply with permits that will fully protect aquatic life and other uses of Alaska's waters. Permits could include a variety of conditions to ensure water quality is protected.

DEC would retain the authority to prevent backsliding by assuring that any standards currently achieved must continue to be met and would have the ability to mandate that the best and most feasible treatment technology be used. As you may know, DEC is aware of no technologies currently available for widespread shipboard use that would allow standards to be met. From DEC's technology conference held last month, it appears there are new waste reduction and treatment options that could become commercially available in the future. We want to encourage improvement, and continue to explore these options.

I appreciate your interest and efforts in this issue and hope this information is helpful as you continue hearings on this legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Palin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Sarah Palin  
Governor

# Alaska State Legislature

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*Session: (Jan. – May)*  
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## REPRESENTATIVE JOHN HARRIS

March 11, 2009

Governor Sarah Palin  
Office of the Governor  
Juneau, Alaska

Subject: Large Commercial Passenger Vessel Wastewater Discharge Permits

Dear Governor Palin:

This is to call your attention to legislation relating to wastewater discharge permits for large passenger vessels operating in state waters. Policy direction from your office would be helpful to the legislature, coastal communities, vessel owners, and many interested individuals toward resolving this issue.

House Bill 134 would provide the Department of Environmental Conservation with the same authority to regulate wastewater discharges of large vessels that it has with other entities. Current law – which was established by voter initiative in 2006 – requires testing of vessel wastewater specifically at the point of discharge.

Testing at the point of discharge imposes a different methodology than that which exists for any other industry or municipality in Alaska. For example, mining operations, seafood processing, and coastal communities have their discharges tested at a reasonable distance away from the discharge point. Be that as it may, clean water itself should be our standard, and if someone is polluting our waters, then DEC must step in and stop them.

In spite of the initiative's language, DEC issued a general permit for all large commercial passenger vessels on March 25, 2008 that provides interim effluent limits and recognizes that vessels need time to make changes to their operations or equipment. The compliance schedule provides a deadline of 2010 to fully meet new standards for ammonia, copper, nickel, and zinc.

I believe this first discharge permit was a good first step. It complies with the citizens' initiative, and it establishes a reasonable approach toward developing vessel treatment systems that will keep our marine water clean.



Two bills have already been signed into law that have amended the citizens' initiative. One, by former Sen. Kim Elton, removed state ferries and other vessels of similar size from the initiative's requirements. Another, by Rep. Lindsey Holmes, removed certain passenger disclosure provisions. HB 134 – if enacted – would not be the first change to the initiative.

As the prime sponsor of HB 134, I have confidence that DEC is fully qualified to evaluate the best available methods and technologies and apply them to the operational permits that cruise ships must obtain. A technology session recently held by DEC revealed several approaches that could result in protecting Alaska waters; however, it found that not all systems could work on all vessels, not all vessels could discharge to shore, and all this is a developing field needing further evaluation by DEC. The bottom line is that your administration is working right now toward bringing the best treatment systems possible on board vessels as quickly as possible.

By having confidence in DEC's ability and efforts, I sponsored HB 134. Giving the agency broad authority does nothing to diminish water quality standards. Its officials are working hard to implement the best treatment technology as quickly as possible, and they will hold vessels to high water quality standards.

Unless a bill is enacted this session that amends the testing requirement "at the point of discharge," both large commercial passenger vessels and DEC will face a difficult decision. Either the agency will have to continue to issue permits that don't meet the requirements of the citizens' initiative or large commercial passenger vessels will have to abide by standards for which technology is not now available.

HB 134 returns that authority to the agency. Your support for the legislation will convey your confidence that the agency will do the job that we expect it to do.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Representative John Harris

cc: Commissioner Larry Hartig, Department of Environmental Conservation  
Jerry Gallagher, Legislative Director, Office of the Governor

CSAW  
Campaign to Safeguard America's Waters



Earth Island Institute

4/5/09

Madame Chairman and Members of the Senate Resources Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on HB134. My name is Gershon Cohen Ph.D., I am a 25-year resident of Haines, Alaska. I am one of the co-sponsors and drafters of the Alaska Cruise Ship Ballot Initiative (CSBI) that became law by a majority vote of Alaskans in 2006.

I urge you to adopt several key amendments to the current bill so that it may be supportable by all sides of this debate:

First and foremost, there must be a reasonable sunset date for closure of the WQS waiver program included in the bill or it will fail two fundamental tests: (1) adequate protection of our State marine resources, and (2) respecting the intent of Alaskans who voted in a clear majority in 2006 to pass the cruise ship ballot measure. CSBI sponsors have never challenged DEC decision to give the industry a reasonable timeframe for compliance provided the ships make an honest effort to comply with the law. But without a meaningful deadline, any incentive to improve their performance will simply disappear.

Second, the intent language in Section 1 implies, if not provides, an inappropriate level of power to an appointed body over the actions of DEC. The role of the Science Panel is to assist DEC in its examination of wastewater treatment technologies. No decision by the department should be in any way dependent on this consultation. It must be clear DEC is free to accept or reject the panel's findings without prejudice and make its own decisions. The simple way to achieve this is to end the sentence in Section 1, line 11 with a period after the word "discharge." The following sentence can read, "The Department of Environmental Conservation shall establish a science advisory panel to assist the Department in its evaluation of technologically effective and economically feasible wastewater treatment options."

Third, DEC stated in its Feb. 16, 2009 *Draft Feasibility Study: Reducing Concentrations of Dissolved Metals and Ammonia in Large Passenger Vessels Wastewater Discharges* that technologies exist capable of achieving all State WQS at the point of discharge. DEC staff further stated in their report of March 2, 2009 *Water Division Staff's Status Report* that only 4% of the samples taken in 2008 violated interim permit limits and ~1/3 of the time cruise ships were already meeting the long term limits without a mixing zone. Obviously, full compliance is not only possible it is already being achieved by some members of the fleet. We therefore recommend the timing for the workshops and reports from the Science Panel described in Section 4 be accelerated by one year. Under the current proposed schedule, most if not all ships will be capable of complying with the law before the Science Panel holds a public workshop, which would defeat its purpose of helping to inform the debate over which technologies are the most effective and feasible.

If the committee is willing and able to amend HB134 to the effect described above, the sponsors of the Alaska Cruise Ship Ballot Initiative will stand in support of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Gershon Cohen Ph.D., Project Director, CSAW  
Co-sponsor CSBI

## Opinion

Vote yes, then fix it This may be the only way to get cruise industry to pay something There is something for everyone in Ballot Measure 2, the citizens initiative on Tuesday's primary election ballot to impose new taxes and fees, stricter environmental rules and consumer disclosure requirements on the cruise ship industry. And there are problems with almost every one of the provisions.

But the indigestion is worth it. That's why we recommend a yes vote. Then get ready for litigation and legislative battles to fix the problems and, we hope, after a couple of years, Alaska will be left with a workable, fair set of laws.

Our fear is that unless Alaska stands up and forces the issue this election, the cruise industry will not willingly pay toward all the services it and its almost 1 million passengers a year enjoy while in our state. Though they are very good at donating millions of dollars to charities and other nonprofits, the cruise lines have been equally strong in battling against state and local taxes and fees.

For example, the industry mischaracterized a 2005 economics study, claiming in its campaign material: "The cruise industry pays over \$42 million annually in taxes to local governments in Alaska." Not quite. Passengers and crew paid an estimated \$17.4 million in local sales taxes. Passengers paid an estimated \$6.4 million in local hotel taxes. Cruise lines paid \$14.6 million in fees to tie up at local ports, essentially reimbursement for costs. That leaves just \$4.5 million the cruise companies actually paid from their own corporate pockets in local property taxes and sales taxes.

That doesn't cut it. Not for an industry that profits from carrying a million passengers to Alaska each year. Without Alaska and all that it offers, there would be no cruises. The \$4.5 million is less than the state collects in rental car taxes, a significantly smaller industry.

The ballot measure would amend state law to require that cruise lines pay corporate income taxes on their shipboard profits, just like any other business making money in Alaska. The cruise industry would have been subject to income taxes under a 1998 Alaska Supreme Court ruling, but it successfully lobbied the Legislature and governor's office to adopt a law retroactively exempting it from the tax.

Also, the initiative's \$4 fee per passenger to pay for onboard state observers to monitor pollution is a good dose of preventive medicine.

Were those the only issues in the ballot measure, this would be an easy yes vote.

The \$46 fee per passenger for the right to come into Alaska might not survive a legal challenge, though a reasonable "head tax" to cover state and city waterfront- and passenger-related expenses is appropriate and legally defensible. And the initiative's provision allowing Juneau and Ketchikan to maintain their own passenger fees on top of the state's fee defeats the idea of a single set of laws.

The provision requiring cruise lines to disclose in big type the commission they earn for selling bus tours, flightseeing tours and such seems like piling on in a measure already heavily weighted with revenge against the companies.

And the 33 percent tax on cruise ship gambling revenues is excessive. Whatever the social ills of gambling aboard the ships, those costs don't fall on Alaska.

One other reason to dislike the initiative is that it taxes only Outsiders, reinforcing the embarrassing attitude of many Alaskans that everyone should pay taxes but us. The solution to that dilemma is not to defeat this initiative but rather to convince Alaskans that they too should pay something toward the public services they enjoy.

The state constitution prohibits legislators from quickly repealing the initiative if it passes, but it allows them to amend the provisions. Between legislative amendments and some wise court decisions, we hope Alaska and the cruise lines can end up with a reasonable set of laws before too much damage is done to one of our few growing industries.

It's an awful lot in one ballot measure. Maybe too much, and maybe it will cause the industry to threaten cutting back its ships' time in Alaska. It has done just that when cities have imposed or even talked about adopting passenger fees. We believe that's the risk of showing the industry that Alaskans are tired of being taken for granted.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Ballet Measure 2 looks like the only way to get the cruise industry's attention.

**adn.com**

Anchorage Daily News

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## **Our view: Cruise law amendment**

### **Cut ships a qualified break**

*(02/16/09 18:49:38)*

The cruise industry finally found its champion to knock five words out of the 2006 cruise ship initiative. Former House Speaker John Harris, R-Valdez, is sponsoring legislation to amend the initiative-passed law by deleting this phrase: "At the point of discharge."

What difference does it make

The amendment would allow the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation to issue permits to cruise ships for wastewater discharge that in effect allows a mixing zone, whereby pollution is measured after it hits the water and is diluted. That's a standard allowed for shore-based sewage treatment throughout the state.

As it stands now, cruise ships have to meet discharge rules stricter than any other operation in Alaska. They can meet them in most categories, except for copper and ammonia. Even in those cases, their effluent is cleaner than what DEC allows sewage treatment plants.

The initiative is clear -- no mixing zones. So the cruise industry wants DEC to have the authority to cut them some slack.

That's fair -- to a point.

Already, to the chagrin of cruise initiative backers like Gershon Cohen, DEC has granted the industry until 2010 to meet the strict pollution standards. Industry spokesmen like John Binkley of the Alaska Cruise Association argue that even that extension isn't enough, and that furthermore, no science shows that the ships' effluent is harming marine life. Cohen argues that no science shows it isn't.

Binkley counters Cohen's assertion that the industry hadn't really tried to meet the copper and ammonia standards, saying the industry is working on it.

Cohen and his allies make no bones about the fact that they are pushing the industry to the leading edge of pollution control, forcing cruise ships to accelerate development and installation of technologies that shore-based, tax-supported facilities can't afford. Why? Because, they say, the industry can afford it. And their goal harks back to the original intent of the federal Clean Water Act, which was to eventually measure all pollution control at the point of discharge.

It's a good push to make, but you have to know when to ease off.

So we yes to the Harris amendment, but with this addition -- require both the cruise industry and DEC to report on the latest practical technologies for the cleanest effluent, and give DEC the authority to require those, at least as pilot programs, within a reasonable time frame.

We're confident Cohen and his allies will help keep DEC and the industry up to date on what's

available.

The initiative will keep its teeth, but delay its bite. And the cruise industry can prove that it's making a genuine effort to meet stricter standards.

The idea here is simple. Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good; cruise pollution controls are vastly improved over 10 to 15 years ago. What they discharge is much cleaner than what Alaska cities pour into Alaska waters every day. Give the cruise lines some leeway.

But not too much; cruise lines cleaned up their acts because people and prosecutors demanded they do. Pressure helps.

If the perfect can be done, let's do it. Meet point-of-discharge rules and all the mixing zone math becomes moot. And Alaska's waters benefit.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Give cruise lines a little latitude on initiative's pollution standards -- but not too much.

### **Do not call**

#### ***Legislature should add cell phones to phone soliciting law***

A small but worthwhile bill before the Legislature would make it a violation of state law to make unwanted solicitations to cell phones.

You can already register cell phones as well as land lines on the national "do not call" list, at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov). That makes unwanted phone solicitation a federal violation.

House Speaker Mike Chenault of Nikiski and several others from both major political parties are sponsoring a bill to make such calls to cell phones against state law as well.

The bill makes it clear that Alaskans can rely on state statute for protection from telemarketers, as well as the federal government.

**BOTTOM LINE:** It's good that the state is updating its phone solicitation law to cover cell phones.

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**KEEP WATCH: Cruise lines need deadlines**

Lawmakers and state officials were still working Tuesday on a bill to give cruise lines more time to meet strict pollution standards in Alaska waters.

More time for cruisers to comply is fair. More devilish are the details of just how long to let the clock run and how to measure progress. First priority: Keep the pressure on.

Backers of the Cruise Ship Ballot Initiative of 2006 have suggested one-year waivers on some discharges for up to three years, provided the cruise lines make progress toward meeting the standards required by the initiative.

Another suggestion has been to let the waiver period run up to five years.

We're not going to quibble about three years or five -- provided the cruise lines have to show progress each year on meeting the stricter standards. In other words, give waivers a year at a time and only when both good-faith effort and the need for more time to comply are clear.

Don't allow a blank check for five years. Or even three. Why allow the time at all? Hard-nosed backers of the initiative argue that cruise companies have spent more energy lobbying for changes than trying to comply since 2006.

Maybe so, but the fact is that cruise ships are spewing far less pollution than they were 10 years ago. They already discharge cleaner water than shore-side sewage treatment plants do. Even with more time, their discharges are less harmful to the marine environment. And cruise ships have the option of detouring to discharge in federal waters, where standards are less strict.

It's better for all hands, and for marine life, if Alaska can drive the stricter standards to become the norm. That keeps our waters clean and raises the bar beyond our borders. If a few more years will get us there, such cleaner cruising is worth the wait.

But keep the waivers conditional, and the heat on.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Cruise ship bill should allow more time, but no free time.