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Seward Residents Want to be Free from Dirty Coal Dust *Railroad, Aurora Energy Get One More Chance to Clean up their Act*

Seward, Alaska: Local conservation groups today put Alaska Railroad Corporation and Aurora Energy Services on notice that the companies need to control the coal at the Seward coal loading facility. A lack of adequate pollution controls at the facility has resulted in ongoing dumping of coal debris into Resurrection Bay and uncontrolled blowing coal dust, damaging water quality in the Bay and threatening the tourism industry it supports.

Concerned about these ongoing problems, Trustees for Alaska, a public interest law firm representing the Alaska Center for the Environment, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, and the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter issued a 60-day notice of intent to file suit over unpermitted discharges of coal into Resurrection Bay in violation of the Clean Water Act.

“Coal dust mitigation has been an ongoing issue since the conception of this facility,” said Diane Dubuc of Alaska Saltwater Charters. “Local boat owners have spent hours on our coal dust remediation efforts.”

Plumes of coal dust develop above ships and fall into the Bay from inadequately contained chutes. Coal is also falling off the conveyor belt that extends over Resurrection Bay. But the pollution doesn't stop there. Due to failing control measures, coal dust blowing from the facility's two giant coal stockpiles coats not just the water, but also charter boats and other vessels in the Bay. In dry and windy conditions, the dust can even invade public health facilities, schools and closed and locked cars.

"The problem of coal dust in Seward is a public health concern. Chronic inhalation of coal dust is associated with pulmonary disease, bronchitis, decreased pulmonary function, and emphysema," said Pam Miller, executive director of Alaska Community Action on Toxics. "Inhalation of coal dust can permanently damage lung tissue. Children, people with chronic illnesses, and the elderly are particularly vulnerable. Putting Seward's residents at risk from coal in our air and water is unacceptable, especially when it can be prevented."

“With so many other threats jeopardizing the health of our oceans, we simply cannot afford to have pollutants such as coal discharging into Resurrection Bay,” said Toby Smith, executive director of Alaska Center for the Environment. “Our 6,000 members are concerned about the impacts that our marine ecosystems face, and hope that the railroad will take the appropriate steps necessary to address this problem.”

“The 60-day notice gives the Alaska Railroad and Aurora Energy, an opportunity to obtain the proper permits and take measures to curtail these unpermitted discharges of coal from the

facility,” said Brian Litmans, attorney at Trustees for Alaska. “It also gives agency regulators the opportunity to weigh in on the legal issues and undertake enforcement.”

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