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Press Release

COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

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EPA Issues Toxics Release Inventory for 2006

DEC TRI guide for Alaska available online

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today issued its annual "Toxics Release Inventory" (TRI) for 2006, a compilation of the total reported weight of certain chemical substances that are emitted or discharged according to permits, are managed, or accidentally released to the environment.

As in previous years, the largest releases in Alaska are contained in waste rock from mines, which accounts for more than 90% of the total pounds reported in 2006. Waste rock contains metals, like lead, in concentrations that are too low to process economically, but could cause health or environmental damage if released to the environment. Handling and disposal of waste rock are subject to strict regulation in Alaska because of the potential for adverse effects.

"The report fulfills an important function," said Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner Larry Hartig, "but it only tells part of the story. It is important to understand that a large part of our efforts in regulating mines is aimed at making sure that waste rock is managed so that metals stay put and are not released to the environment where they can cause damage."

According to EPA's Region 10 TRI Coordinator Brook Madrone, "the large releases reported annually by metal mines in Alaska, including the releases reported for 2006, are due to the reporting of minerals that are listed as TRI chemicals – primarily zinc and lead – remaining in waste rock. This waste rock is disposed of in on-site impoundments. The more rock a mine processes, the more zinc and lead-containing waste rock is released. TeckCominco's Red Dog Mine, the world's largest zinc mine, is no exception.

"The TRI reports chemical release data, but does not calculate exposure or other risk indicators. In determining risk, site-specific information is necessary, including a material's toxicity, persistence in the environment, and amount and duration of human or environmental exposure. TRI data alone cannot be used to quantify risk to public health and the environment," added Madrone.

To help the public better understand the TRI data, EPA has two informative websites: TRI Explorer at www.epa.gov/triexplorer and Envirofacts at www.epa.gov/enviro/

DEC also produces a guide each year to put the TRI data into perspective for Alaskans. This Toxics Release Inventory for Alaska is available at www.dec.state.ak.us

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