



GOT SEWAGE ?
ROYAL CARIBBEAN
DUMPS DAILY



A Cruise Line Starts to Clean Up After Itself

By MATTHEW L. WALD

Cruise lines, after years of sparring with environmentalists, the Coast Guard and federal prosecutors, now say they are voluntarily cleaning up.

Royal Caribbean International, which pleaded guilty in 1999 to 21 felony counts of violating water pollution laws, and paid \$18 million in fines, expects to complete its probation in January. But the company, which was convicted mostly for dumping oily wastes and deceiving the Coast Guard about its practices, is moving on to solve another environmental problem, sewage releases from its ships.

In October, it turned on new systems on two ships operated by its Celebrity Cruises subsidiary, the Summit and the Infinity. These are the first advanced wastewater treatment plants that Royal Caribbean is installing on its 29 vessels, a job that it says will take until 2008, with each ship being done as it comes into dry dock for scheduled repairs.

The circumstances of its decision are under some dispute. An environmental group, Oceana, had been pressuring the cruise line for 10 months, with stunts like flying a banner-towing airplane back and forth around the ships as they prepared to sail, as guests were on deck and well-wishers on shore waved goodbye. The banner said, "Got Sewage?"

Underneath, the banner said, "Royal Caribbean Dumps Daily."

The group suspended its campaign after the cruise line announced in May that it would install better equipment. But Capt. William Wright, the senior vice president for safety and environment, said the cruise line's decision was inde-



Mike Coppock/Valdez Star, via Associated Press

Celebrity's Summit now sails with new sewage-treatment equipment.

pendent of the environmental group.

"There was a period when they were focusing on us as an organization," he said. "What hasn't been publicized as much is that what they were asking us publicly to do was very much already in progress."

He said that his company had delayed making an announcement because it was waiting for the technology to mature.

At Oceana, Jackie Savitz, the pollution campaign director, said that the cruise line was trying hard to seem to ignore the pressure it was under. "We had discussions with them that they later said we didn't have," she said.

The wastes involved are different from the ones that led to the cruise line's indictment in the late 1990's; those were primarily oil discharges, but also chemicals from the ships' dry-cleaning and photo-

developing shops. (The Carnival Corporation, the parent company of Carnival Cruise Line as well as Costa Cruises, Cunard Line, Holland America Line, Seabourn Cruise Line and Windstar Cruises, pleaded guilty in April 2002 to some of the same crimes.)

The issue now is much more basic: sewage. Big cruise ships can carry 4,000 passengers and crew members, and 100,000 people over the course of a year. Human wastes contribute to dead zones in the sea, algae blooms, contaminated shellfish beds and beach closings, according to environmentalists.

"These cruise ships are going to some of the most pristine parts of our ocean, and they're going in droves," Ms. Savitz said. Noting that a town of 4,000 on shore would have to treat its wastes, but outside

Alaska, which requires it, cruise ships do not, she added. "This loophole really needs to be closed."

Cruise ship operators contend that the pollution they contribute is small relative to sources on shore, and they make up only a small fraction of the ships at sea. They acknowledge, however, that they carry most of the people at sea.

Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois and Representative Sam Farr of California, both Democrats, introduced legislation in the last session of Congress that would have made wastewater treatment equipment mandatory. It drew 9 co-sponsors in the Senate and 42 in the House, but did not get out of committee in either chamber. Backers plan to try again in the next Congress.

The industry, though, appears to be moving in that direction on its own. In December 2003, its trade association, the International Council of Cruise Lines, called for accelerated adoption of wastewater treatment technologies, and the use of the equipment when ships are near shore.

Captain Wright of Royal Caribbean said he expected all his competitors to follow his company's lead, although Ms. Savitz said, "I don't know of any other company that has agreed to upgrade the fleet."

Captain Wright said the cost was about \$4 million per vessel, and that solids are separated and held for later burning in incinerators on land. Environmentalists have generally not opposed the burning of sewage solids, because unlike municipal wastes, they do not have the mix of chemicals that creates highly toxic chemicals in the smoke.

The other product of the advanced systems is water, which Captain Wright said had the same clarity and lack of odor as a bottle of Evian. "It's not something we're marketing," he added.