

Water Quality Violations in Alaska 2011-2019

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Abstract:

The poster will present a portion of a research study published in May 2020. The study is titled, "Air and Water Violations in Alaska: 2011-2019." The full report is available from UAA, Institute of Social and Economic Research at: [UAA-Study](#).¹ The poster will present the water portion of that research study.

EPA maintains a comprehensive public list of air and water permits, and of violations, in Alaska. It is an excellent data source and is searchable. The public can quickly see whether any facility has a permit, and what that facility's record has been. However, the database is organized by facility, not by industry. It is difficult to step back from EPA's data and see patterns such as: How frequently do violations occur? Which industries accumulate the most violations? The highest penalties? It is not easy to use EPA's available data to answer these questions.

The poster, based on the paper, takes EPA's publicly available data and organizes it by industry. Its purpose is to allow the reader to step back and see the patterns about compliance and violations of Alaska's water requirements as a whole. It is intended to provide a statewide and industry-by-industry view of water violations and compliance in Alaska. A comprehensive apples-to-apples comparison of industries provides a useful complement to the fragmented source of newspaper articles, advertisements, charges, and countercharges that may otherwise form people's impressions about air and water violations in Alaska.

The conclusions are different, depending on how you categorize violations. For the lowest level of violation - those meriting solely an informal enforcement action - the violations are spread widely throughout Alaska's industries, except that logging has very few. The greatest number of violations come from Alaska's wastewater treatment facilities, followed by those of the seafood processing industry.

Penalties are different way to measure violations. The penalty amount measures, in part, the seriousness of the issue. In assessment of penalties from 2011-2019, the seafood processing industry has far and away the highest dollar value of penalties. Over two-thirds the value of the total penalties assessed during those nine years were assessed to seafood processing. It also had the largest number of

¹ https://pubs.iseralaska.org/media/dc9f3ec0-b2d6-4efa-89aa4fa0aab42a1b/Air_and_Water_Violations_in_Alaska.pdf

violations with penalties, and the highest penalty per violation. However, it is important to remember that the method for assessing penalties includes a mechanism to lower the fine for municipally owned facilities and small businesses. The only industry, other than seafood processing, that accumulated more than one penalty per year was placer mining. This industry had 11 penalties over the nine years, though average fine per penalty for these small businesses was relatively small.

The final way to measure violations was EPA's violations of significant non-compliance. In this measure, most seasonal businesses such as placer mines and seafood processing facilities are not included. In this measure, wastewater treatment facilities had the largest number of these violations – more than double the number of other industry groups.