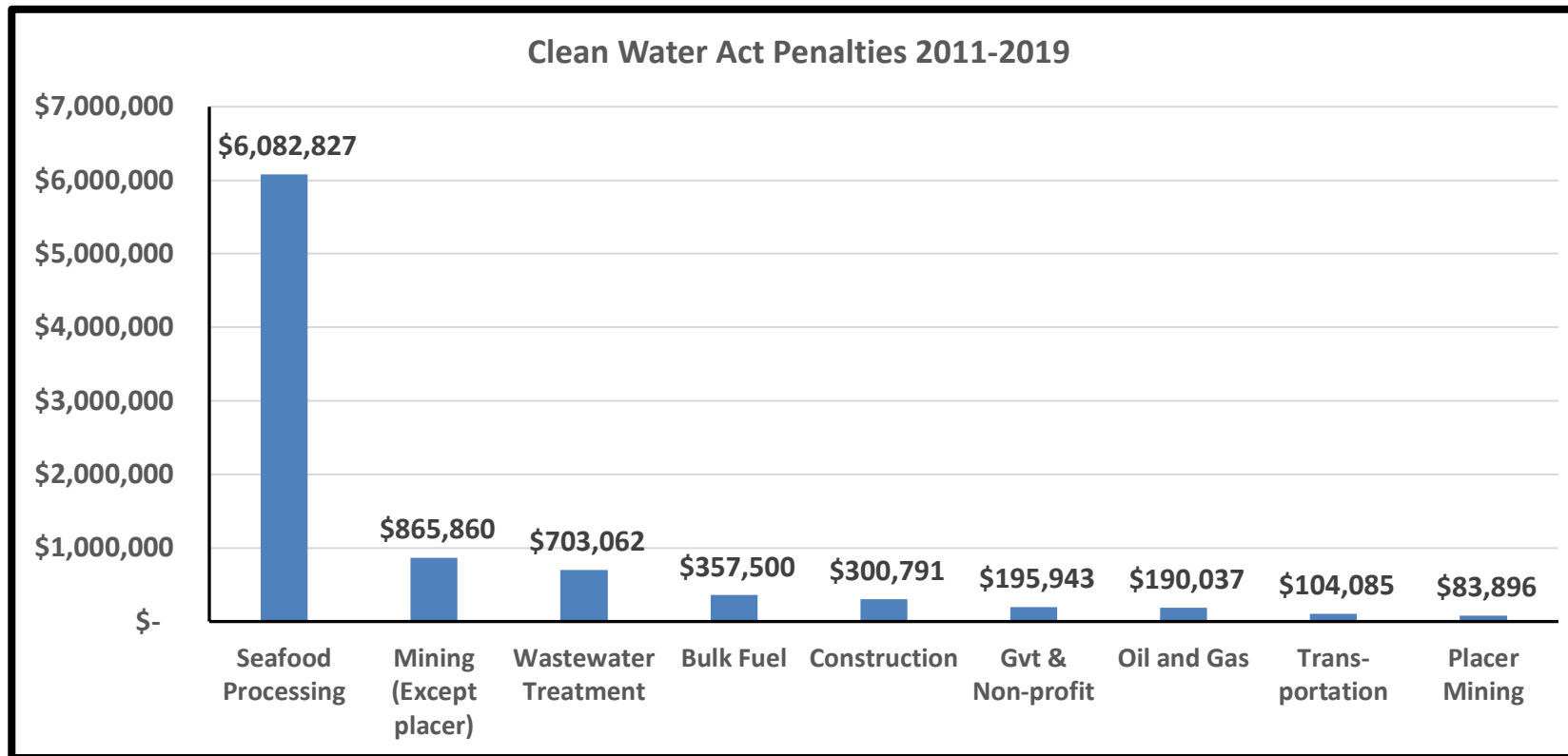


## Water Violations in Alaska: 2011-2019

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For the publication this poster summarizes see:  
<https://iseralaska.org/publications/?id=1803>



EPA maintains a public list of water permits and violations in Alaska. 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?

This poster summarizes an ISER research paper which organizes EPA's publicly available data by industry. It allows the reader to step back and see the patterns about compliance and violations of Alaska's water requirements as a whole. It provides an apples-to-apples comparison of industries which is a useful complement to the of newspaper articles, advertisements, charges, and countercharges that may otherwise form people's impressions about water violations in Alaska.

EPA's public database counts violations using different methods. The chart at left measures penalties assessed against an industry based on violations from 2011 through 2019. The penalty amount measures, in part, the seriousness of the violation. 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 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. Wastewater treatment plants and placer mining are two of the industry groups which likely benefited from this method of fine reduction.

A less precise way to measure violations is to count all enforcement actions. The chart below does that. Because there are so few large mines, and because exploration activities rarely receive an enforcement action by this chart combines all parts of the mining industry. Most of the mining-related enforcement actions are for placer mines.

The figure shows that wastewater treatment plants had more than 75 informal enforcement action in the last five years. This may not be surprising given the large number of wastewater treatment plants and the fact that many are located in small, remote communities. On the other end of the chart, few logging facilities had informal enforcement actions. Many of the enforcement actions for all industry groups stemmed from a failure to file a required report. Overall, 319 of the 1,501 facilities have experienced informal enforcement action during the last five years. That is more than one-fifth of the facilities. This percentage indicates that an informal enforcement action appears to be a low threshold. Put another way, the fact that an enforcement action occurred does not describe the gravity of the situation: it may show a problem, but the problem may not compromise the environment or affect human health.

The data shows that 32 facilities have received a formal enforcement action during those five years. A formal action is a significantly higher threshold of seriousness. The number of formal actions varies from seven actions in the seafood processing industry down to the logging industry which experienced none. Many of the formal actions end up with a penalty assigned. The size of the penalty does take into account the seriousness of the violation and is therefore a better measure of the violation's severity than the fact of whether a violation is formal or not.

