



Minnesota Center for  
Environmental Advocacy



**CLEAN WATER ACTION**  
MINNESOTA

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Monday Nov.30, 2009

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### **Groups call on Coast Guard to toughen ballast water rules**

*Quicker timelines also needed to keep invasive species from Great Lakes*

ST PAUL, MN— Six Minnesota organizations today urged the U.S. Coast Guard to adopt tough national standards for ships on the Great Lakes in order to finally stop the introduction and spread of harmful invasive species into those five water bodies and their tributaries.

The environmental organizations, in a letter to the Coast Guard, stressed that the proposed rules must be effective in killing even small organisms in the ships' ballast water and the deadlines for this must be soon. The groups are Clean Water Action, Izaak Walton League of America-Minnesota Division, Minnesota Center for Environmental

Advocacy, Minnesota Environmental Partnership, Save Lake Superior Association and the Minnesota Council of Trout Unlimited.

“Now is the time for action,” said Henry VanOffelen, natural resources scientist for the Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy. “A new aquatic invader is discovered in the Great Lakes every six to nine months. Strong Coast Guard rules are one of the best opportunities to prevent future introductions and the spread of these invasive species but only if the standards are strong and the timeline short.”

Invasive species from ballast water—such as zebra mussels, the round goby, and viral hemorrhagic septicemia—are costing Great Lakes residents billions of dollars and wreaking havoc on the health of the lakes and damaging the important fishing industry.

The invaders are sucked up into the ballast tanks of ships before they leave their home ports in other nations and are discharged at ports in the Great Lakes. With no natural enemies, some of the discharged organisms multiply quickly, become established, spread throughout the Great Lakes on inter-lake freighters, and remain here forever.

In their comments, the environmental groups stated the new standard should be at least as restrictive as the California state standard which allows the fewest live organisms in the ballast water discharged into a lake or ocean port and which has a future goal of “zero viable organisms.”

The groups mentioned two treatment systems already on the market which would meet the California standard. The groups rejected the “very lax International Maritime Organization standard,” which seems more interested in protecting the shipping industry at the expense of the Great Lakes and the people who live near them. Likewise, the groups strongly urged the Coast Guard to set an earlier timetable for the shipping industry to meet the new standards.

“With new invasive species entering the Great Lakes every year, and the annual costs associated with invasive species measured in the hundreds of millions of dollars, we cannot afford unnecessarily long implementation timelines, or timelines with escape clauses that render the timeline meaningless,” the groups wrote.

There should be a rapid response program to control and perhaps eliminate new invasive species as soon as they are detected. Lakers, ships that only sail within the Great Lakes, must be covered under the rules, not just ocean-going vessels. Finally, states must

retain the right to impose even more strict standards than national standards, the groups stated.

The environmental organizations also noted that President Obama has requested \$475 million for Great Lakes restoration, including \$60 million for attacking invasive species. It does not make good economic sense to invest that sort of money if new Coast Guard rules are so weak that the Great Lakes will continue to be invaded by foreign species.

New, tough rules also would provide jobs in the Great Lakes regions as ships are retrofitted, and new systems, including on-shore treatment systems are tested and built, the groups said.

The deadline for all comments on the Coast Guard rules is Friday. Comments may be submitted on-line at <http://www.regulations.gov>. and must include the docket number USCG-2001-10486.