

## Trident Fine May Force St. Paul Plant Closure

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Alexandra Gutierrez/KUCB

The Clean Water Act settlement between Trident Seafoods and the Environmental Protection agency might not be quite settled. St. Paul's tribe, Native corporation, and fishing association are pushing the federal government to reconsider terms that they say could lead to the closure of their only year-round processing plant. KUCB's Alexandra Gutierrez reports.

In September, the EPA announced that Trident was being fined \$2.5 million for hundreds of Clean Water Act violations documented at Alaska plants over the last decade -- the biggest settlement of its kind. The company also agreed to spend \$30 million on facility upgrades that would limit the discharge of fish waste that can create dead zones on the seafloor.

All 18 of Trident's plants in Alaska are expected to see business change in one way or another as a result of this agreement. The Akutan plant, for example, has five years to develop a filtering process that will let next to nothing through its screens and shrink their waste pile down by half. The Naknek facility has three years to get a fishmeal plant up and running. But in St. Paul, there are no slated upgrades at the Trident plant, and there's no extended timeline for improvement: Starting this year, the facility there has simply been banned from releasing any amount of fish waste between May and November, around the time that fishing gets hot and that the shrinking population of fur seals gathers on the island.

Since the Trident facility is the only shoreside plant in St. Paul and the island's biggest moneymaker, local interests are saying that this rule could torpedo the economy there. According to a letter sent to the Department of Justice by the

regional Native corporation TDX, which leases property to Trident, the discharge ban would "effectively shut down the facility until Trident can provide for other, expensive arrangements, if it decides to stay at all." Because of that, it's asking the government to suspend the settlement language that affects St. Paul -- or stay the decree entirely, if that's not possible.

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Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association expresses similar concerns. In its letter, the community development quota group states that a restriction during that time period would prevent the plant from processing up to \$5 million worth of halibut and about \$1.5 million worth of king crab. They also suggest that about a fifth of the town's population could see their income disappear if the regulation causes the plant to shut down during the profitable summer and fall seasons.

But

the biggest potential wrinkle for the settlement could be that St. Paul's tribal government says that it wasn't consulted as part of this process. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island argues that the EPA didn't follow federal law \*and\* their own policy of including Native groups on civil legal matters.

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now, the EPA is currently evaluating these comments, and the agency offered a written statement that it "plans to complete the consultation process prior to finalizing the consent decree." The agency added that part of the reason it decided to go with an all-out ban on waste during the summer months is that the St. Paul facility is processing a lot more halibut than it did when it first got its discharge permit two decades ago and that the plant is now releasing 50 times as much waste in area waters. Even though the agency doesn't know if there are any dead zones around St. Paul, it says that because of that permit history along with "routine non-compliance of the facility and the proximity of the outfall to sensitive species and habitat, they decided to treat the Trident plant there differently from plants in other parts of Alaska.

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agency did not offer a timeline for their decision on the settlement.

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