

## Sen. Begich Renews Interest in Storis Disposal

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

With Mexican authorities now showing interest in the environmental safety of dismantling the 71-year-old former Coast Guard Cutter Storis in their country, U.S. Senator Mark Begich says his office will look further into whether U.S. agencies acted appropriately in allowing the ship to be auctioned off and exported for scrap.

"Did EPA and the Coast Guard knowingly ship something that had hazardous waste, like you said asbestos and other things, to another market? I don't know the answer to that question; (but) that's something we can follow up," Begich said. "We have not been following the Storis since it's been sold off for scrap. So we have not done any additional follow up, but you've added to the list, now we've got to put it back on the list to find out what's going on. We will do that."

The Storis is currently at a shipyard in Ensenada, Mexico, south of San Diego. It was towed there in October by a company that paid about \$70,000 for the ship at auction this summer.

Marine historian Jon Ottman says U.S. agencies ignored environmental rules prohibiting the export of dangerous chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, which he claims could still aboard the Storis, encapsulated in old wiring and equipment.

"If this vessel does indeed contain illegal amounts of PCBs, then this process has been flawed from the get-go, right from the disposal processes, transferring the ship from the Coast Guard to the GSA, and then selling through the GSA to the buyer in San Diego, and then government allowed the ship to be exported."

Ottman says he has been in contact with environmental agents in the U.S. and Mexico, and has been getting more cooperation from south of the border.

"We've attempted to contact the United States Environmental Protection Agency to get them involved, but their enforcement people refused to take responsibility for their original lack of due diligence in allowing the ship to be exported," he said. "The Mexican authorities have been more responsive (and) seem genuinely interested and agreed that there appears a need to test the ship for levels of PCBs above regulated levels. But EPA at this point won't pick up the phone to contact their counterparts in Mexico to offer technical assistance or guidance for this process."

Ottman says that while PCBs and asbestos are not dangerous when left intact, covered in decades of paint or enclosed by bulkheads, the cancer-causing chemicals would be exposed if the ship were cut up for scrap metal.

"If Storis is contaminated and they do get the green light to cut the ship up, they could literally, physically open the proverbial can of worms, because they may end up cutting up the ship only to find they've exposed all of these toxic materials, and they really don't have any infrastructure down there to properly dispose of these materials."

Ottman says

he has heard from several former Storis crewmen who confirmed the presence of the dangerous materials. We'll have more tomorrow.