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Virginia Marine Company and President Plead Guilty to Clean Water Act and Refuse Act Violations

NORFOLK, Va. – Marine Environmental Services, Inc., (MES) and its President, Jerry R. Askew, Sr., of Portsmouth, Va., both pleaded guilty today in Norfolk federal court to knowingly discharging pollutants into water of the United States in violation of the Clean Water Act and discharging refuse matter into navigable waters of the United States, in violation of the Refuse Act.

Neil H. MacBride, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, made the announcement after MES and Askew entered a guilty plea before United States Magistrate Judge F. Bradford Stillman. MES faces a maximum penalty of five years of probation and a \$500,000 fine, and Askew faces a maximum penalty of one year in prison and a fine of \$100,000, when they are sentenced on August 24, 2011.

According to court documents, in October 2005, MES, headed by Askew, was hired to clean the tanks of the *USS Pawcatuck*, a decommissioned tanker that was scheduled for disposal. A prior survey of the *Pawcatuck's* tanks determined they contained 2.1 million gallons of ballast water polluted by oil, grease, bacteria, heavy metals, and other materials. During the cleaning process, MES and Askew knowingly discharged approximately 500,000 gallons of the polluted ballast water into the Elizabeth River without a permit. As part of its plea, the Court records state that MES has agreed to invest \$50,000 in community service projects that directly benefit the Elizabeth River watershed.

This case was investigated by the EPA Criminal Investigative Division, the Defense Criminal Investigative Service, the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, the Coast Guard Investigative Service and the Department of Transportation, Office of Inspector General. Assistant United States Attorney Joseph Kosky and Special Assistant United States Attorney David Lastra are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States.

A copy of this press release may be found on the website of the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.justice.gov/usao/vae>. Related court documents and information may be found on the website of the District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia at <http://www.vaed.uscourts.gov> or on <http://pacer.uspci.uscourts.gov>.

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