

Laboratory Technician Sentenced

On April 7, 2006, Thomas R. Austin was sentenced in U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska to 36 months of probation and was ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine and a \$100 special assessment. This follows Austin's January 25, 2006, guilty plea to making a false statement under the Clean Water Act.

Between April 2001 and August 2003, Austin was a laboratory technician with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company, Valdez, Alaska. Austin admitted that in March 2002, he falsified laboratory data provided to the EPA under Alyeska's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. Specifically, on March 24, 2002, while performing water sample analysis, Austin performed an undocumented manual modification of criteria on a laboratory sample. Austin submitted a hard copy report indicating that the sample had passed the established criteria when, in fact, it had not. As a result, the data from the sample analysis were unreliable and of unknown quality.

Based on the March 2002 result falsifications, Austin was terminated from employment with Alyeska in July 2003. At that time, Alyeska hired an outside environmental consulting firm to verify the results of an internal investigation of Austin's actions which Alyeska initiated in February 2003. The consulting firm corroborated Alyeska's findings that Austin had actually falsified and changed 102 data samples. These findings were further corroborated by EPA's investigation. On May 31, 2006, Austin was debarred under the Clean Water Act.

(Case Cost: \$58,840)