

In striving to become more environmentally responsible and prepare for new legislation, cruise lines are making bold steps towards greener practices. Andrea Ashfield talks to **Marcie Keever** of Friends of the Earth and **Jamie Sweeting** of Royal Caribbean to find out how the industry is cleaning up its act.

In the last five years, cruise lines have made significant steps in their handling of environmental issues, yet they continue to be viewed as one of the most poorly-performing sections of the tourism industry. As the demand for sustainable travel increases, cruise lines have been criticised for their waste practices, along with their potentially detrimental effect on ports that are unable to cope with growing passenger numbers. However, operators are working under increasingly strict regulations, and many are setting their own environmental targets over and above these requirements. But is the industry doing enough for a greener future?

Marcie Keever, campaign director for Friends of the Earth's (FOE) Clean Vessels Campaign, does not think so. She believes the industry has a long way to go before its environmental policies reach a high enough standard. 'Cruise ships travel to some of the most pristine, environmentally-sensitive places on earth, and they have

# Green waters



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the capability to dump sewage, burn dirty bunker fuel and emit greenhouse gases,' she says. 'Shipping is one of the last unregulated industries in the world and has escaped the stringent regulations typical of cars, trucks, oil refineries and power plants.'

FOE estimates that during one week, a large cruise ship generates 210,000 gallons of human sewage, one million gallons of grey water, 25,000 gallons of oily bilge water, up to 11,550 gallons of sewage sludge and more than 130 gallons of hazardous waste, much of which is dumped into the ocean. The problem is exacerbated by airborne pollutants and

the spread of invasive species through dumped untreated ballast water.

'Many passengers would be surprised to find out that travelling on a cruise ship results in a much higher carbon footprint than an aircraft journey,' continues Keever. 'In addition, many people travel by plane to the cruise terminal, which adds to the environmental impact of the journey.'

## Problem solving

These figures do not look promising, but there is plenty of evidence to suggest that the cruise industry is taking steps to address the situation. Jamie Sweeting, vice-president of environmental stewardship

at Royal Caribbean Cruises, thinks a lot of progress has already been made. 'From around 2004, the industry began to change its act and turn things around,' he says. 'New ships are designed with space set aside for waste handling, and some have walk-in freezer rooms to store trash that will be offloaded elsewhere.' The company also has

agreements in place with its suppliers to control the volume of delivered materials in order to reduce ship-generated waste.

Sweeting thinks it is unfair that cruise lines are held solely accountable for the procedures at ports. 'There's a presumption that ships are responsible for everything that happens in a port, but it's not necessarily up to the cruise line to determine everything,' he says. 'In order to make each destination sustainable, work needs to be done by the cruise operator, along with local government, to provide a set of guidelines on how tourism should be developed.'

In a 2006 report, *From Ship to Shore*, Sweeting and a number of other experts concluded that stakeholders should

work together in order to minimise the environmental and social effects of cruising. The report, produced for The Center of Environmental Leadership in Business, also advised that an effort should be made to maximise local benefits and introduce sustainable destination management policies and practices.

The industry is also beginning to come under increasingly strict regulations, such as the Clean Cruise Ship Act of 2008, which will achieve a substantial reduction in water-based pollution in the US. If passed, the bill will ban the discharge of hazardous waste, sewage sludge and incinerator ash within US waters. It will also prohibit the discharge of sewage, grey water and oily bilge water within 12 nautical miles of the coast.

In addition, the International Maritime Organisation, in October 2008, approved substantial revisions to an agreement regulating ship air emissions; MARPOL Annex VI.

The adoption of the new measures, along with the introduction of a coastal ship pollution control zone, will allow the US to cut air pollution caused by ships from as early as 2010.

### Extra targets

A growing number of operators are also setting their own environmental targets over and above current regulations. In August 2008, Carnival Cruise Lines unveiled a range of initiatives, such as an extensive management plan for processing of waste generated onboard its ships.

Holland America has adopted similar measures, with the aim of reducing the estimated eight tonnes of rubbish that accumulates during a seven-day cruise.

In spite of these efforts, environmental groups feel there is much more work to be done. 'We appreciate that they're trying but in some cases we see ships sacrificing environmental protection to add more cabins,' says Keever. 'They can afford to make the investment. We don't want it to be a case of too little, too late.' ship discharges levels.

As Sweeting notes, adopting greener practices offers a secondary benefit, that of attracting passengers who are increasingly aware about the effects of pollution. 'We have a competitive advantage over other forms of travel,' adds Sweeting. 'It would be lovely if hotels and resorts managed their waste streams as well as we do.' *wc*



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