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# Europe to clamp down on ship discharges



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Ships in European Union seas could face significant fines not only for oil spills, but also for sewage and garbage discharge, transport and tourism committee MEPs said yesterday.

On Thursday, the committee voted to update EU rules on preventing pollution from ships in European seas and ensuring perpetrators face fines. It would ensure all international standards on preventing illegal discharges from ships, developed by the International Maritime Organization, become part of EU law and as a result become more easily enforceable.

MEPs supported the proposal to extend current EU rules prohibiting the discharge of oil and noxious liquid substances to include the discharge of sewage, garbage, and residues from scrubbers.

They want shipowners to bear the responsibility for any environmental damage caused by ship pollution, in case the master or crew responsible for the illegal discharge can no longer be found or cannot afford to pay the full amount of the penalty. MEPs also want EU governments to avoid setting maximum or minimum penalties for

infringements to ensure that the effectiveness and proportionality of penalties are not undermined.

Current EU rules have been responsible for the introduction of the CleanSeaNet, a European satellite-based alert system for oil spill and vessel detection. Because this system lacks reporting on how pollution incidents were followed up, transport MEPs are in favour of encouraging more information exchange between member states and the commission on pollution incidents. They also want 50% of CleanSeaNet alerts to be verified on the spot and as soon as possible, to prevent an illegal discharge from dispersing and therefore becoming undetectable by the time of arrival on the location.

"The current EU rules do not work, because they are weakly applied by member states. This is unacceptable. It is time for member states to step up and protect European seas from the harmful effects of ships illegally dumping waste. It is necessary to effectively detect illegal discharges and set penalties at levels that serve as a real deterrent," EP rapporteur Marian-Jean Marinescu said.

The draft negotiating mandate was approved by 36 votes to one. Transport committee MEPs also unanimously backed a decision to start talks with member states on the final shape of the legislation, once plenary has given its green light next week.

