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Trident Seafoods advances efforts to eliminate COVID-19 from Akutan plant

Jan. 26, 2021 (Seattle, WA)—Trident Seafoods today confirmed progress on its plan to isolate and eliminate COVID-19 from its facility in Akutan, Alaska. The company learned the virus was present about a week ago, when it tested an ill employee readying for a medical evacuation. In response, the management team immediately began implementing a comprehensive testing strategy and isolation and quarantine plans to eradicate the virus before resuming operations.

“We have a great team focused on making sure we’re preventing further spread of the virus while we continue to assess each individual employee’s health, care for the sick and understand who has already been infected,” said Trident CEO Joe Bundrant. “We will take every step possible to ensure our people and plant are safe before restarting production.”

The company’s facility-wide testing strategy was initially slowed by weather delays, but testing supplies and additional medical professionals are now on site. A medical team is conducting rapid antigen tests for quick results and is also collecting samples for PCR tests, which detect the virus’ genetic material and are slower but more accurate, to be shipped to a lab outside of the region. All employees are quarantining to prevent further spread. Management and essential support teams are following strong workforce protection protocols.

Stefanie Moreland, Trident vice president of government relations, said the rate of positive tests is relatively high so far but only about half of the 700 employees on site had been tested as of early Tuesday, Jan. 26. Testing started with high-risk populations and individuals who were known to have had close contact with infected workers. Trident will report the rate of positive tests after it has rapid-test results from most of the employees on site.

“As we continue to test, we are also assessing and monitoring the health of all individuals across the facility,” Moreland said, “We arranged Coast Guard-assisted evacuations yesterday for two employees whose condition was quickly worsening. We now have more private-sector resources lined up in case further emergency evacuations are needed and weather permits.”

Employees at higher risk of illness – and who are more likely than others to need medical care if they become ill – are being transferred to monitored quarantine sites that are more accessible than Akutan to ensure faster, easier access to care.

Moreland said all workers are being paid during quarantine. She reported that employees are cooperating well and that morale is high on site, despite the disruption.

“We’re providing safe activities, wellness support, WIFI data cards for downloading books, magazines and other entertainment, and are providing a safe checkout and return process for on-site games and movies,” she said. “We’re grateful for our people’s strength and resilience in a challenging situation.”

ABOUT TRIDENT

Trident Seafoods, 100-percent American-owned and privately held, is the largest vertically integrated seafood harvesting and processing company in North America. The company employs more than 8,000 people and serves hundreds of independent harvesters throughout Alaska each year. In addition to its primary processing facilities in ten coastal communities in Alaska, Trident owns and operates three large whitefish catcher-processors and four mobile processing ships. Trident’s “From the Source to the Plate” motto exemplifies its continuing commitment to stay close to the resource, to know its fish and its fishermen, and to maintain the quality and integrity of its products throughout the value chain. Trident serves markets in more than 50 countries with wild Alaska seafood products. It has facilities in the U.S., Japan, Europe, China and Latin America.

Trident’s Akutan shore plant is remote and entirely self-reliant, in proximity to Bering Sea fishing grounds on an island located 750 miles southwest of Anchorage in Alaska’s Aleutian Chain. With more than 1,400 company-housed employees during peak seasons, Akutan sustains a year-round, multi-species frozen seafood operation capable of processing as much as 3 million pounds of raw fish per day. Wild Alaska pollock—the Bering Sea’s most abundant whitefish—is the primary focus of the Akutan operation, and the plant also processes significant volumes of Pacific cod, Alaska king & snow crab, halibut and other important species.