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Trident Seafoods pauses operations in Akutan to prevent COVID-19 spread

Jan. 21, 2021 (Seattle, WA)—Trident Seafoods today announced a three-week pause in operations at its processing plant in Akutan, Alaska, to enable comprehensive testing and support a preventative quarantine for its 700 workers there.

“Our review of protocols has so far shown that our robust quarantine protocols have been closely followed and successful,” said Trident CEO Joe Bundrant. “We have not determined how the virus entered Akutan but are investigating all potential gaps. This serious action to stop operations is necessary to allow us to do everything we can to provide a safe work environment and resume full operations as quickly as possible.”

Stefanie Moreland, Trident vice president of government relations and seafood sustainability, said the company made this decision with advice and input from the State of Alaska and with knowledge of lessons learned from others in our industry.

“We know that COVID-19 is now on the site, and until we test everyone we won’t know how extensive it is,” she said. “This is the best way to contain the spread of the virus.”

The pause comes at what would be the start of Trident’s important pollock season, and with crab and cod processing under way.

“It’s extremely difficult and impactful to do this,” Moreland said. “A pause in operations is a sacrifice and burden for all of us at Trident, as well as for our partners. We’re working through a variety of scenarios to lighten the burden for everyone affected by changes in our operation plans.”

All 700 workers in Akutan will remain in their company housing and receive daily health checks for the duration of the pause. Trident will continue to hold on bringing any new personnel to Akutan and is exploring moving some of its employees who were in quarantine destined for Akutan to other Trident locations. The company will pay its workers for quarantine time and is working to provide support to make their isolation as tolerable as possible.

“We’re very mindful of the sacrifice our people are making,” Bundrant said. “We’re putting the health and safety of our workers first while working to understand and mitigate operational impacts. Those impacts are really secondary.”

Numerous state and local bodies, including the City of Akutan, Eastern Aleutian Tribes, and other medical professionals, have provided essential assistance through this process, Bundrant said. State of Alaska officials have been meeting with Trident staff daily.

“I am beyond grateful for their incredible support and partnership,” Bundrant said, noting that Akutan Mayor Joe Bereskin personally went to great lengths to help evacuate Trident’s ill employee over the weekend.

Trident is optimistic about its ability to resume work in Akutan.

“We feel with the full cooperation from employees on site, we’ll be able to resume full operations in approximately three weeks,” Moreland said.

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 from its 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.