

Enviros sue EPA over ocean acidification

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SEATTLE -- An environmental group is suing the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, seeking to have Washington coastal waters listed as impaired because carbon dioxide is making the ocean more acidic.

The Center for Biological Diversity said the EPA has failed to consider how ocean acidification is adversely affecting water quality and marine animals.

The complaint filed Thursday in U.S. District Court in Seattle alleges the EPA violated the federal Clean Water Act by not listing Washington ocean waters as impaired, even though the group says research shows carbon dioxide in seawater is threatening marine ecosystems.

"The EPA has a duty under the Clean Water Act to protect our nation's waters from pollution, and today, CO2 is one of the biggest threats to our ocean waters," said Miyoko Sakashita, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity.

Ocean acidification refers to a change in the chemistry of water due to excess carbon dioxide from

the atmosphere. As more carbon dioxide dissolves in the ocean, it lowers ocean pH, making it more acidic. The pH value is used to measure a liquid's acidity or alkalinity.

The EPA says these ocean changes present potential risks to marine ecosystems. Researchers have observed adverse changes in marine life with calcium-carbonate shells, such as corals and mussels.

Enesta Jones, an EPA spokeswoman in Washington D.C., said Thursday the agency will respond after reviewing the complaint.

"We take concerns regarding acidification of ocean and coastal waters very seriously," Jones said. "Protection of the nation's water quality is among EPA's highest priorities."

In 2007, the environmental group asked the Washington Department of Ecology to add Washington ocean waters to its impaired list because of ocean acidification. The listing requires a plan to be developed to improve water quality and limit pollutants.

Ecology didn't do so because it said the group did not submit actual monitoring data required by state law.

The Center for Biological Diversity then asked the EPA to take the action. In January, the EPA approved the state's list without including any ocean segments.

In its complaint, the group cites a study published last year in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that found marine waters were becoming more acidic and harming certain sea animals. Water samples in that report were taken near Tatoosh Island off the point of Washington's Cape Flattery and showed pH levels that violate clean water standards, the group said.

The group wants Washington ocean waters, as far as three miles off the coast, to be designated as impaired when they fail to meet water quality standards. It is represented in the lawsuit by the nonprofit Crag Law Center in Portland, Ore.