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EPA, State of Hawaii negotiate final settlement with U.S. Navy to upgrade Red Hill storage tanks

After extensive public comment, Navy agrees to additional protective measures

HONOLULU – Following a 50 day public comment period, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) announced the final agreement with the U.S. Navy and the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) that requires the military to take immediate and long-term steps to minimize the threat of future leaks at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility near Pearl Harbor, Oahu. In response to over 140 public comments, EPA and DOH secured additional measures from the Navy and DLA that improved upon the original proposed settlement.

“EPA listened to the public, and the result is a strengthened agreement,” said Jared Blumenfeld, EPA’s Regional Administrator for the Pacific Southwest. “Now the work can start, and we look forward to collaborating with DOH and local stakeholders on this long-term effort to protect public health and Hawaii’s precious aquifers.”

The agreement is an Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) under authority of the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act and state laws and regulations. Additional measures secured based on public comment include:

- Involvement of subject matter experts such as the Honolulu Board of Water Supply and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources;
- Installation of additional monitoring wells as soon as possible to address data gaps;
- Annual meetings to brief the public on progress being made;
- Compliance with new federal Underground Storage Tank regulations in advance of the regulatory deadlines;
- Expanded details regarding the scope of Tank Inspection, Repair, and Maintenance procedures;
- A commitment to install Best Available Practicable Technology in the tanks at Red Hill as soon as reasonably possible, and
- Consideration of alternative fuel storage options/locations.

With the finalization of the agreement, work will begin on developing the scope of work for each of the tasks included in the AOC’s Statement of Work. Much of the initial planning and decisions on how to proceed will be accomplished over the next two years. Each of the massive underground storage tanks that are in service will be upgraded in phases as quickly as practicable, but tanks that have not been upgraded within the following 20 years will be taken out of service. Costs of the upgrades are likely to run into the tens of millions of dollars, with better estimates to be available once feasibility studies are completed.

The AOC commits the military to install improved technologies for fuel release prevention and detection at the facility and take steps to address past fuel releases. EPA and DOH will approve all work performed by the Navy, and monetary penalties may be imposed in the event the work is not conducted in accordance with the AOC's deadlines and requirements.

In addition to upgrading the tanks at Red Hill, the agreement requires the Navy and DLA to conduct an analysis of the hydrogeology of the area surrounding the Red Hill facility, study the extent of contamination caused by previous fuel releases, evaluate potential cleanup methods, and assess the risk the facility poses to Oahu's drinking water resources, all within the next two years.

"The signing of this agreement is the critical first step to making improvements to protect the groundwater resources beneath and surrounding the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility," said Keith Kawaoka, Hawaii Department of Health's Deputy Director of Environmental Health. "We are committed to work with the EPA, the U.S. Navy and the DLA to overcome the significant challenges associated with these unique and massive storage tanks to get the job done right and to protect public health and the environment."

In January 2014, while refilling Tank 5, the Navy identified a loss of jet fuel from the tank and reported it to DOH, estimating that about 27,000 gallons was released. The Navy drained the tank and collected samples from existing water monitoring wells. Results of samples taken around Tank 5 indicated a spike in levels of hydrocarbons. The Navy increased the frequency of monitoring at a nearby Navy drinking water well, and current monitoring results for the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam water system confirmed they were in compliance with federal and state drinking water standards both before and after the January release.

Red Hill, constructed in the 1940s, is a unique facility in the United States, consisting of 20 underground bulk fuel storage tanks built into a mountain hillside. Each tank is 250 feet tall and 100 feet in diameter, constructed of steel and encased in a minimum of 2.5 to 4 feet of concrete surrounded by basalt bedrock. Each tank has a fuel storage capacity of 12.5 to 12.7 million gallons, giving the facility a maximum capacity of approximately 250 million gallons. Eighteen tanks are currently active, and two are not in use.

For more information, please visit: <http://www3.epa.gov/region09/waste/ust/redhill/index.html> and <http://health.hawaii.gov/RedHill>.

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