

BOARD OF WATER SUPPLY

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU
630 SOUTH BERETANIA STREET
HONOLULU, HI 96843
www.boardofwatersupply.com



December 20, 2021

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Manager and Chief Engineer

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Deputy Manager and Chief Engineer

The Honorable Joe Biden, President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

Military families on Oahu, Hawaii, have been subjected to misinformation about the safety of their drinking water by the United States Navy and this has put their health at risk. The long-term consequences of ingesting and using water from the Navy's system are not yet known.

As a result of the Navy's lack of transparency, the Honolulu Board of Water Supply has had to take extraordinary measures to ensure the freshwater aquifer that serves the civilian community is adequately protected. I am writing to implore you to urgently intervene in this serious situation to protect Hawaii's freshwater aquifer that serves residents and businesses on Oahu, where the population has reached a million people. Hawaii is beginning to make a slow but steady recovery from the pandemic, and water contamination would be a serious setback, crippling our visitor-industry based economy.

After the Navy's fuel leak at Red Hill in 2014, the Honolulu Board of Water Supply has relentlessly continued to forewarn the community about the need to relocate the 20 fuel tanks containing a total of 250 million gallons of fuel located just 100 feet above one of Oahu's main aquifers. It is unfortunate that it has taken seven years and a crisis of this magnitude with major repercussions before the Navy finally acknowledged the seriousness of this situation.

When Secretary of the Navy, Carlos Del Toro came to Hawaii, he took the time to listen to the community's concerns, offered apologies, and pledged to take action. We were led to believe the Navy had turned the corner. However, when Hawaii's Governor David Ige issued an order for the Navy to immediately cease its Red Hill fuel tank operations and to remove the fuel, we were disheartened that this was met with resistance. It appears we are no further along in seeking a resolution to this dangerous situation.

The Honorable Joe Biden, President

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I would like to emphasize that many in the community are keenly aware of the presence of the Navy and other military branches is critical for national security. We are also cognizant that the military is a key component of our local economy. However, we believe this symbiotic relationship must be based on reciprocal respect for Hawaii's people and our national resources. Blatant disregard for our water supply is short-sighted and, ultimately, will greatly diminish the value of Hawaii as a strategic geographical location in the Pacific for the military.

Further water contamination will have devastating effects that could take decades to resolve. It would also require costly alternative infrastructure investments. That is why immediate action is necessary. Every day that the Navy does not take action is another day of built-up frustration, anger, and vitriol. Hawaii has taken center stage in this issue and the world is watching. How the Navy responds will determine how much faith and confidence Americans will have in the military for all future endeavors.

On behalf of Oahu residents, I am asking you to step forward and direct the Department of Defense to immediately defuel the Navy's World War II vintage underground fuel storage at Red Hill and take affirmative steps to relocate the fuel storage tanks so that they are not over our precious, irreplaceable drinking water aquifer.

Thank you very much.

Very truly yours,



ERNEST Y. W. LAU, P.E.
Manager and Chief Engineer

cc: U.S. Senator Mazie Hirono
U.S. Senator Brian E. Schatz
U.S. Representative Ed Case
U.S. Representative Kaiuli'i Kahele
Governor David Ige