

From the Ho'okele newspaper archives: (11/20/15): Stakeholder letter updates community about Red Hill (pg. A-3) - <https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/64132>

## **Commentary**

### **Stakeholder letter updates community about Red Hill**

**Rear Adm. John V. Fuller**

*Commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Sur-face Group Middle Pacific*

*(Editor's note: This letter from Rear Adm. John Fuller, commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific, was sent to elected officials and other stakeholders Nov. 13 and is posted on Navy Region Hawaii's Red Hill web-page. As part of Rear Adm. Fuller's stated commitment to keeping the community informed, the letter is printed here for our readers.)*

Thank you for your continued support to our Navy team in Hawaii. As you know, the Navy, Defense Logistics Agency (DLA), United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Hawaii's State Department of Health (DoH) signed a landmark agreement on Sept. 28 covering future actions at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.

The Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) provides a path ahead for future inspections and modernization up-grades that will further protect drinking water and minimize the risk of future releases from the facility.

This agreement also confirms that these par-ties will work together into the future to fulfill our collective responsibility to protect Oahu's drinking water while acknowledging the facility's strategic importance to our nation.

The AOC lays out specific requirements, along with deadlines and milestones for completing each task. These tasks include: tank inspections; repairs and maintenance; upgrade alternatives and release detection processes; tank tightness testing; corrosion and metal fatigue studies; and ground water protection and evaluation. EPA and DoH may assess monetary penalties against the Navy and DLA if deadlines are missed.

My staff met with Hawaii's DoH and the EPA at the end of October to address the first set of deadline requirements. These requirements included an exchange of information on tank inspections, fuel release response procedures, surveillance monitoring, ground water modeling and tank corrosion dynamics.

As part of the continuing facility modernization efforts that began before the AOC negotiation, we recently awarded over \$43 million in contracts to upgrade the facility's fire suppression, ventilation and oil-tight door systems.

Since the fuel loss from tank 5 in January 2014, we increased our vigilance and response capabilities. We continuously monitor fuel levels and conduct tank inspections.

When fuel is transferred in Red Hill, we follow and then exceed industry standard operating practices with an added level of measured scrutiny and precaution.

We employ state-of-the-art automated alarms and regularly test our response capabilities. Taken together, I am confident we have minimized the possibility of future releases at the Red Hill facility.

Due to the complexity of the surrounding geology, the EPA, DoH and Navy will be consulting with experts to determine what actions should be taken to address the fuel that was lost in January 2014. We will be gathering additional information as to how quickly fuel breaks down in basalt as part of natural biological and chemical processes.

To date, all available evidence indicates that no free product fuel re-leased from the Red Hill facility has reached the aquifer. The AOC requires that before any precipitous actions are taken, additional studies must be conducted to add to our collective knowledge as to the nature, fate and transport of fuel constituents in this particular location.

Meanwhile, my environmental professionals continue their long-term effort to monitor ground water and drinking water sources and to provide the result to the regulatory agencies for evaluation and assessment. The results indicate that the drinking water remains safe for all users.

As you know, the Navy's Red Hill drinking water shaft is the drinking water source closest to the Red Hill facility. Over the years, we have detected trace amounts of fuel constituents (parts of fuel) at this location in levels so low that they often cannot be quantified by the EPA-certified labs we are required to use.

The sampling results to date indicate that, when detected, these constituents have always been well below environmental action levels (EALs). EALs are established by the regulators as standards protective of human health. We provide the sampling results to the DoH for evaluation.

Let me assure you that we remain committed to continued compliance with the DoH-approved groundwater protection plan and the updates to that plan which will be prepared pursuant to the AOC. With DoH and EPA oversight, the Navy and DLA will be responsible for implementing any remedy that would be needed to continue to keep the drinking water safe. We will not walk away from our responsibilities.

I am dedicated to making this a transparent and inclusive effort and will continue to communicate frequently with you about our progress.

As you receive this, I'm proud to report that we have conducted our 75th familiarization visit to the facility in the past 18 months, showing it to more than 500 stakeholders. They learned about the facility's operations and our environmental protection efforts. Our guests also had the opportunity to comprehend the size of the facility and appreciate why it may take more than 20 years to complete the agreed up-grades throughout the entire facility.

Your continued support is invaluable. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time regarding the AOC's progress or Red Hill operations

I encourage you to learn more about Red Hill by reviewing the Navy's website or suggest that you subscribe to the EPA's website ([www3.epa.gov/region9/waste/ust/redhill/index.html](http://www3.epa.gov/region9/waste/ust/redhill/index.html)).

Thank you again for your time, interest and extraordinary support to our Navy.

**Rear Adm. John Fuller**