

Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility

Frequently Asked Questions

Transition from Defueling to Closure

Q. What is the Navy doing to prepare for the transition from the Joint Task Force - Red Hill to the closure of Red Hill? Do you have confidence that the Navy can safely close Red Hill?

Answer: Joint Task Force – Red Hill (JTF-RH) completed gravity defueling in December. The timing of the transition from the JTF-RH to the Navy Closure Task Force – Red Hill (NCTF-RH) is occurring in phases. Last summer (2023), the Navy worked with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Indopacific Command (INDOPACOM), and the JTF-RH to clarify the conditions that will trigger the transition from JTF-RH to the Navy. An action plan and organizational structure for the NCTF-RH has been putting people in place for the transition. The NCTF-RH will maintain the same continuous engagement with external stakeholders and the community as did the JTF-RH, with open and transparent communication. The Navy’s goal is for the public, the regulators, and defense personnel to have the same level of confidence in the NCTF-RH as they have shown for the JTF-RH.

Q. How is the Navy building back trust with the Hawaiian people?

Answer: Since the establishment of the JTF-RH in 2022, the Navy has been part of virtually every community meeting and stakeholder engagement alongside the JTF-RH to provide information and answer questions about the water distribution system, the water monitoring program, closure planning, and environmental remediation. The Navy will continue this high level of engagement through the transition from the JTF-RH to the NCTF-RH, when the Navy will take over the lead for all engagements. The NCTF-RH, as well as Navy Region Hawaii and the other Navy commands based in Hawaii, will maintain the tempo and quality of engagement with external stakeholders and the community established by the JTF-RH, with open and transparent communication.

Q. Why was the Department of Defense responsible for the defueling and the Department of the Navy responsible for closure? Is JTF-RH involved in closure? Why was another task force established for closure?

Answer: The JTF-RH was formed to safely defuel the storage tanks at Red Hill. Once JTF-RH removes the recoverable fuel from the tanks, the process will move into the Closure Phase, where the Navy assumes responsibility for the actions required to close the Red Hill tanks per HAR Section 11-280.1. The Navy is completing the formation of a team of professionals who will focus completely on accomplishing the long-term, complex closure mission, the NCTF-RH. These professionals are working alongside their JTF-RH counterparts to listen and learn as they prepare to lead the final phases required to close the facility.

Q: JTF-RH has clear Command and Control for Defueling. What is the Command and Control for Closure? Who is ultimately responsible?

Answer: Commander, Navy Region Hawaii is dual hatted as Commander, Navy Closure Task Force - RH. He commands the people, systems and equipment required to safely execute the tank closure plan. Deputy Commander, NCTF-RH, oversees the day to day activities of the project, and the first line leaders of the NCTF-RH who execute the Department of the Navy’s Tank Closure Plan. In addition to command

authority, Commander Navy Region Hawaii also brings the capabilities of supporting commands to assist NCTF-RH in their closure responsibilities.

Tank Closure

Q. How will the Red Hill underground storage tanks be closed?

Answer: The Department of the Navy formally seeks Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) approval for “Closure in Place” as the permanent tank closure method for Red Hill. Under this method, the tanks would be eliminated from service, thoroughly cleaned, and left in the ground. The NCTF-RH would properly manage and dispose of all sludge, rinse water, waste, and other materials generated during closure activities like tank cleaning. The tanks would not be filled with inert material, but the NCTF-RH would take steps to prevent them from being used again for fuel or storage of other hazardous materials.

After the report to Congress required by the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on beneficial non-fuel reuse of Red Hill’s fuel tanks is submitted and released to the public, the DoD will work with the State of Hawaii and EPA to review and consider feasible options. The inputs collected will be used to inform the final decision on how the fuel tanks will be used in the future. If a beneficial non-fuel reuse option is identified and approved, the NCTF-RH will consult with DOH and EPA to identify and implement the specific steps to prevent future fuel storage while still allowing the beneficial non-fuel reuse.

Q. What tasks are required for tank Closure in Place?

Answer: Upon the completion of defueling, closure in place will involve ventilating the tanks to ensure clean air for the workers, pressure washing the tank walls with an approved cleaning solution, isolating the tanks from vents and openings, and disconnecting unneeded electrical systems. In order to allow the crews to work safely within the large tanks after defueling, NCTF-RH professionals will inspect the central towers, fix catwalks, install lifelines, and provide lighting. The NCTF-RH will also install hoists and booms for the spider buggies, suspended metal baskets raised and lowered to allow the workers to clean the 200-foot vertical walls and upper domes of the tanks. The concept of operation for this and all closure related activities are coordinated closely with regulators and receives their approval prior to commencing.

Q. When will Red Hill be closed?

Answer: Per the Tank Closure Plan as well as the third-party analysis, the NCTF-RH estimates tank closure will last a minimum of three years. The earliest estimate for permanent tank closure is three years after the NCTF-RH assumes Full Operating Capability (FOC), or about April of 2027. All Red Hill Tank Closure documents can be found at the following link: [DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY CLOSURE PLAN, RED HILL BULK FUEL STORAGE FACILITY](#)

Q. Why will tank closure take so long?

Answer: The timeline for tank closure at Red Hill is controlled by three factors: the extremely large size of the tanks, limited access through the tunnels, and the need to ensure worker safety. The Red Hill

tanks are deep underground, and the only access is through two long and narrow tunnels that provide little space for moving materials, personnel, and equipment. For Closure in Place, the most time-consuming jobs will be tank ventilation and tank cleaning. Prior to cleaning, complete ventilation is essential to purge each tank and provide clean air for the workers. Ventilation is accomplished by installing ducts and blowing air into the tanks, but the access tunnels provide little space for the ducts, so only a limited amount of air can be delivered to the tanks. Cleaning involves pressure washing performed by workers in spider buggies (suspended metal baskets that are raised and lowered along the vertical walls and upper domes of the tanks), but only two spider buggies can be deployed from the central tower of each tank. Given these access limitations and the extreme size of the tanks, ventilation and cleaning will take many months. Furthermore, because the work is deep underground and involves great heights, a careful, methodical approach is needed to ensure worker safety.

Q. Is there any way to accelerate the tank closure process with added workers or equipment?

Answer: NCTF-RH adopts the JTF-RH perspective on the speed of work: “slow is smooth, smooth is safe.” We will continuously analyze our operations to look for ways to accelerate the tank closure process or make it more efficient, but we will never put the safety of our people at risk to do so. While we will communicate clearly on progress throughout, the pace of work is ultimately limited by the difficult layout of the tanks and access tunnels. The need for worker safety and the restrictive layout of the tanks and tunnels create limitations to the size of the air ducts and the number of workers that can be added to the tank closure effort. The access tunnels are narrow, and must remain open for movement of workers, equipment, and materials, so there is little space in the tunnels for the temporary air ducts that must be installed to ventilate the tanks. During tank cleaning, workers are suspended in spider buggies, which are metal baskets that are raised and lowered to allow cleaning of the vertical walls and upper domes of the tanks. Within each tank, the boom and central tower can accommodate only two spider buggies, and the spider buggies will hold only one to two workers. In order to ensure worker safety, the booms, towers, and spider buggies cannot be overloaded.

Q. Why are the pipelines being removed and how long will it take?

Answer. The pipelines are being removed to ensure fuel can never again be stored at Red Hill. The work will commence in 2025 and last approximately three years. This is because there are 11 miles of pipe to remove, and NCTF-RH conducts all activities safely and deliberately.

Q. Why is “Closure in Place” the best alternative? Could the facility be repurposed for another use?

Answer. The Navy identified Closure in Place as the best alternative for permanent tank closure because never putting fuel in the tanks again minimizes impacts to the environment and public health. This alternative allows for beneficial non-fuel reuse of the tanks. There are currently three studies to consider non-fuel reuse options either in progress or recently completed. After the report on beneficial non-fuel reuse of the tanks is submitted to Congress and released to the public, the State of Hawaii, DoD, and EPA will review and consider feasible options to inform the final determination on any reuse option, if approved.

Q. Does the Navy have experience closing facilities like Red Hill?

Answer. While Red Hill is a uniquely constructed facility with large capacity tanks, the DoD and Navy have previously closed the San Pedro bulk fuel storage facility. Additionally, the DoD/Navy has extensive

technical and project management capabilities to support the closure of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in coordination with DOH, EPA and other Federal, State, and local stakeholders.

Q. Does the Navy have experience with environmental cleanup at facilities like Red Hill? Is the Navy hiring contractors to assist with cleanup and closure?

Answer. The Navy has environmental cleanup experience with releases of similar magnitude but differing site conditions (i.e., location, site geology). The Navy has executed feasibility studies and employed an array of cleanup technologies in collaboration with various EPA, Federal, State, and local regulators. Some example cleanup sites include Defense Fuel Support Point San Pedro and Point Loma. The Navy will partner with contractors certified in the removal, containment, transportation and safe disposal of contaminated material.

Q. How much will this cost? Is cost a factor in the Navy's decision on which option?

Answer. Our biggest priority remains public health and safety – protecting the environment and protecting the community. A third-party analysis of alternatives provided estimated costs to compare alternatives, but these are not intended for planning purposes as labor and material costs fluctuate over time. These comparative estimates were not a factor in the decision to propose closure in place.

Q. What other liquids or materials could the tanks be used to store in reuse? Would it include items that may be non-fuel but potential contaminants to the environment?

Answer. The Red Hill tanks will **never** be used again for storage of fuel, hazardous chemicals, or potential contaminants. Upon review of options for beneficial non-fuel reuse, the Navy will work with the DOH to identify the best option, if any, and develop a methodology to execute. The Navy will utilize the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to enable full disclosure to the maximum extent possible to inform the public of potential impacts and involve the public in the decision-making process in the reuse of the facility. The Navy is committed to protecting the people and environment of Hawaii and will not pursue any beneficial reuse options for the Red Hill facility that could contain potential contaminants.

Q. During and following the Nov. 20, 2021 fuel spill, residents in the areas close to Red Hill reported the strong smell of fuel as it was apparently vented from the facility. Would residents be subject to fuel or chemical odors for an extended period? What mitigations would be in place to protect residents in the surrounding areas from the fumes during venting?

Answer. The tanks are ordinarily vented to atmosphere. Movement of fuel out of the facility has not yet resulted in the release of fuel or chemical odors to the surrounding environment. The release of fuel and chemical odors during the event on November 20th was due to the release of fuel itself. After the fuel has been removed, venting concerns are considerably decreased.

Q. Does the Red Hill Tank Closure Plan address the fuel oil from historic spills trapped in the area between the tank bottoms and the aquifer?

Answer. The tank closure plan addresses historic fuel spills in the sections on Site Assessment in support of permanent tank closure and the Release Investigation and Answer for soil and groundwater cleanup. The Navy has already performed many activities to address any fuel that may be trapped between the tank bottoms and the aquifer. As additional information becomes available, the Navy will

expand efforts as needed to protect human and environmental health at Red Hill. All Red Hill Tank Closure documents can be found at the following link: [DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY CLOSURE PLAN, RED HILL BULK FUEL STORAGE FACILITY](#)

Q. How long will the study of beneficial non-fuel reuse options take? How soon could the tanks begin reuse for non-fuel purposes? Is there at least a general estimate of time required?

Answer. A final determination on the reuse of the facility is not required in order to close it. There are currently three studies to consider non-fuel reuse options either in progress or recently completed. After the report on beneficial non-fuel reuse of the tanks is submitted to Congress and released to the public, the State of Hawaii, DoD, and EPA will review and consider feasible options to inform the final determination on any reuse option, if approved.

Q. How long after closure will the Navy remain committed to continued remediation of the ground and aquifer below the Red Hill facility?

Answer. Commitment is a Navy core value. The Navy is committed to pursuing the remediation and recovery of the Red Hill site and ensuring the protection of human health and the environment throughout and far beyond the defueling and closure of the Red Hill underground storage tanks. Our top priority is continuing to protect and restore the island's water source and ensuring the health and safety of our community for generations to come. The Navy takes weekly samples of soil vapor and groundwater and will likely conduct extensive testing of the drinking water system beyond the minimum of 24 months to ensure there is no remaining contamination in the drinking water system. Over the past few months, the Navy has taken action to ensure the protection of Oahu's aquifer and the environment around Red Hill through various efforts. Some of these include identification and removal of contaminated soil, utilizing a granular activated carbon (GAC) filter system to create a capture zone at the Red Hill Shaft, conducting skimming operations to remove possible contaminants from the well, and expanding our monitoring well network to provide more data on water in the aquifer.

Beyond Red Hill, in August 2022, the DON and the State of Hawaii entered into a cooperative agreement for the DON to put \$14.9 million in Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program (REPI) Challenge funding towards the Pearl Harbor Aquifer and the surrounding ecosystem. The focus of this REPI initiative, which kicked off Aug 1, 2022, is to safeguard drinking water supplies at Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam and protect the upland forests as a necessary action toward protection of the aquifer and the replenishment of water to support installation resilience and readiness.

Drinking Water

Q. Is the drinking water at Red Hill safe? How is the Navy ensuring the water remains safe?

Answer. The Red Hill Shaft has been physically disconnected from the Navy's water distribution system since December 2021. Since then, water has been solely sourced by the Waiawa Shaft located 6.2 miles from Red Hill, remains safe, and is monitored under the interagency-approved Drinking Water Long-Term Monitoring plan, which ensures it meets Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards for safe drinking water.

Since March 2022, more than 7,200 water samples have been tested as part of the Navy's Red Hill Long Term Monitoring (LTM) program by an EPA-certified laboratory and show that the water remains safe to drink. The Navy received two calls about water through its Emergency Operations Center (EOC) since Oct. 10, 2023. Both homes were tested and identified as non-detect for total hydrocarbons.

Validated test results are available to view on the interactive dashboard on the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) Safe Waters website at www.jbphh-safewaters.org.

Q. What should I do if I have concerns about my water?

Answer. If residents have concerns about the quality of their water and prefer in-home testing, the on-call Rapid Response Teams (RRT) can gather drinking water samples to test for the presence of total petroleum hydrocarbons. Residents can contact:

- Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam Emergency Operations Center (EOC) - (808) 449-1979, or (808) 448-3262/2557/2570/2583

State officials are also taking concerns:

- DOH Safe Water Drinking Branch – 808-586-4258 or SDWB@doh.hawaii.gov; and
- EPA Desk line – 415-947-4406

Q. Where can I find information about the Navy's Red Hill water monitoring activities? What information can I find?

Answer. The Navy's interactive dashboard on the Environmental page of the JBPHH Safe Waters website (www.jbphh-safewaters.org) allows users to view groundwater data from its groundwater monitoring wells dating back to October 2016. The dashboard includes an instructional video to help users navigate the site, which allows sorting sample results by well location, contaminate, analyte group and screening level. The Navy currently tests for approximately 116 contaminants, or analytes (chemical subject that is being analyzed), from 39 groundwater monitoring wells in the vicinity of the Red Hill facility. Sampling results from the groundwater monitoring wells are shared with the DOH and the EPA as soon as the results are validated by the laboratories. The DOH makes the data available on their website at: <https://health.hawaii.gov/ust/red-hill/update-may-6-2021-release-monitoring-data-posted-weekly/>.