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Navy Installs New Groundwater Monitoring Wells Around Red Hill

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – In the ongoing effort to ensure water safety at Red Hill and the surrounding area, the Navy has installed two of 10 new planned groundwater monitoring wells near the location of the Nov. 20, 2021, fuel spill at the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.

The installation of these new wells and resulting expanded monitoring capability will help in making informed and environmentally protective decisions.

The Navy is working with the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and other stakeholders to install the new monitoring wells, referred to as plume delineation wells, in the immediate vicinity of Red Hill to test for the presence of contaminants and to evaluate potential impacts to the local aquifer.

The remaining eight plume delineation wells are in the process of permitting and drilling, with completion expected in April 2023. The next two plume delineation wells will be completed in August, while the remaining six wells are in the permit and drilling process and expected to be completed within the next 10 months.

“This is an important step in our ongoing work to provide safe drinking water and protect the aquifer and the environment,” said Rear Adm. Steve Barnett, Navy Region Hawaii commander. “We are aligned with the Hawaii Department of Health and other stakeholders in this effort and remain committed to informing the public of actions that are taking place while we work on completing requirements for the defueling plan.”

The Navy has taken initial samples from the completed wells, designated P-01 and P-02, and will share all validated sampling results with DOH and EPA. Samples are being sent to an independent, certified laboratory on the mainland.

The Navy is also planning to install 12 additional groundwater “sentinel” monitoring wells between Red Hill and neighboring drinking water sources in order to provide a warning if any contamination in the aquifer were to migrate. Under the required permitting process, the first of these wells are planned to begin installation in August 2022, with completion of the final well expected in September 2023.

The Navy has contacted owners and operators of other groundwater monitoring wells in the vicinity of Red Hill in order to gain a broader understanding of the aquifer and its groundwater dynamics.

The Navy has continuously collected data from 21 previously-established groundwater monitoring wells around the fuel storage tanks at Red Hill. Since May 2021, there have been intermittent detections of total petroleum hydrocarbon (TPH) above DOH's Environmental Action Level (EAL) in some of those monitoring wells, but the data did not present a clear pattern to infer contamination movement. The Navy continues to partner with DOH on data analysis.

Sampling results from the Navy's groundwater monitoring wells are shared with DOH and EPA as soon as the laboratory validates the results. 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/>

In addition to groundwater sampling, the Navy has continued to install new soil vapor monitoring ports near the Nov. 20 release site. Soil vapor monitoring allows the Navy to conduct more localized soil gas vapor sampling to better characterize and understand any contamination "hot spots" immediately below the access tunnel. Installation of deep soil vapor monitoring ports is planned to be complete in August 2022, and intermediate-depth ports will be installed in November 2022.

The Navy will continue to coordinate with DOH and EPA to better understand the underground conditions in the area of Red Hill and evaluate potential remediation activities. Additional remediation activities may include removing contaminated soil or employing bio-remediation techniques to accelerate the natural degradation of petroleum compounds.

For more information on these actions, go to the news section of <http://www.navy.mil/jointbasewater>.

For more information on long-term monitoring of the Navy water distribution system, go to <https://jbphh-safewaters.org>.