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Drinking Water Experts from the Navy, EPA, DOH Developing Extended Drinking Water Monitoring Plan for JBPHH

JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii – The Navy convened a team of drinking water experts the week of Jan. 29 to determine the root cause of low-level detections of Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPH) reported in the Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) water system, responding to, and further examining recent health and safety concerns from members of the community.

The water in the JBPHH drinking water system continues to meet federal and state safe water drinking standards – and has throughout the two-year Long-Term Monitoring (LTM) plan. A “Swarm Team” was activated to reinforce the Navy’s commitment to determine the cause of low-level TPH detections, develop follow-on actions to address the detections, and to develop a follow-on, voluntary drinking water monitoring plan. As part of the ongoing root cause analysis, the Navy and Department of Health (DOH) are collecting additional water samples this week from residences and the Waiawa shaft.

The Navy, DOH, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are collaborating on the development of a focused post-LTM monitoring plan, as well as an advanced sample analysis effort and will share the results when sufficient data is available, in as early as two to three weeks. The Navy recognizes the significance of potential health and safety concerns and takes these issues very seriously.

“We hear and understand the community’s concerns, and I want the community to know that the Navy will voluntarily continue to monitor the drinking water system after the LTM program ends next month,” said Rear Adm. Steve Barnett, commander, Navy Region Hawaii. “We will take the recommendations from this team and incorporate them into what we’re calling the Extended Drinking Water Monitoring Plan. The health of our military members, families, and neighbors served by the JBPHH drinking water system is paramount and we are doing this to continue to go above and beyond to ensure their safety and well-being.”

Since the start of LTM in March 2022, the Navy has taken nearly 8,100 water quality tests without a single TPH exceedance and the JBPHH drinking water system has remained within federal and state safe drinking water standards. Drinking water test results are available at www.jbphh-safewaters.org.

The Swarm Team, includes members from Navy Installations Command; Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command; Navy and Marine Corps Force Health Protection Command (NMCFHPC); Naval Sea Systems Command Lab Accreditation Program; Navy Region Hawaii; Navy Closure Task Force - Red Hill (NCTF-RH); Defense Health Agency (DHA); Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); DOH; and consultants from AECOM, AH Engineering Consultants, and Pioneer Technologies. The team discussed the potential causes of recent low-level detections of TPH and the development of an Extended Drinking Water Monitoring Plan, a voluntary follow-on testing plan to Long-Term Monitoring (LTM), to assure the public that there is no residual fuel in the drinking water and, when coupled with required Safe Drinking Water Act sampling, that the drinking water continues to meet all federal and state safe drinking water standards.

These experts worked collaboratively with personnel from EPA and DOH to determine the potential cause of the low-level TPH detections in residences that use the JBPHH water distribution system. The Swarm Team's evaluation included examining the possibility of residual fuel in the distribution system, biofilm, laboratory analysis concerns, and other potential sources of organic hydrocarbons which could contribute to the low-level detections.

The Navy also recognizes the health-related impacts some community members have experienced and assembled a group of medical experts to evaluate the recent increase in medical concerns. The team includes experts from DHA, NMCFHPC, and DOH. Navy Medicine representatives continue to closely monitor ongoing reported medical symptoms and is encouraging individuals with health concerns to contact their Primary Care physicians.

To ensure the health and safety of our service members, their families, and civilians, the Navy will continue testing the water system and homes, provide bottled water until validated results are received, and communicate with the community with up-to-date information. Additionally, the Navy is working with DOD to extend operations of the Red Hill Medical Clinic beyond the original 1-year timeframe that was schedule to end in March 24 and to allow anyone who has symptoms they believe are related to the water to be seen at the clinic. More information on this initiative will be shared soon.

Residents concerned with the safety of their water are encouraged to contact the JBPHH Emergency Operations Center at 808-449-1979 (24/7) and have a water test scheduled at their convenience.