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Navy to brief Hawai'i lawmakers on Red Hill, water safety

By Navy Region Hawai'i Public Affairs

PEARL HARBOR -- Two commanding officers and their subject matter experts will brief Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair of the Senate Energy and Environment Committee, and other Hawai'i lawmakers Friday, March 7, 2014 about the Red Hill Fuel Storage Facility and Navy's ongoing commitment to protect drinking water.

The Navy representatives' main point is that the drinking water drawn from the area is safe.

Captain Mike Williamson, commanding officer of Naval Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) Hawai'i and regional engineer for Commander, Navy Region Hawai'i, will give an update to state senators and house representatives about efforts to locate and repair a petroleum leak discovered earlier this year at the Navy's Red Hill fuel facility and on the steps to improve monitoring technology of tanks, conduct soil sampling and protect groundwater.

"We are wholly committed to protecting the environment and our vital fresh water sources," Williamson said. "I believe we have taken prudent measures to ensure the water remains safe to drink and we look forward to working collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure public safety while maintaining this critical national strategic asset."

Captain Mark Wheeler, commanding officer of Fleet Logistics Command (FLC) Pearl Harbor, will explain how a fuel level discrepancy in Tank 5 at Red Hill was detected, leading to a mitigation response and immediate notification.

"It was our fuel operators at Red Hill who noticed and reported a discrepancy in the fuel inventory level of JP-8 aviation fuel in Tank 5, which led us to discover the leak," Wheeler said. "As soon as the suspected leak was reported, we began moving fuel out of Tank 5, while at the same time notifying local, state, federal, Navy and Department of Defense agencies."

Wheeler added, "Tank 5 had been off-line for four years for a 'clean, inspect and repair' maintenance cycle. The Navy received Tank 5 back from the repair contractor 'certified' that all repairs were completed and Tank 5 was ready to fill."

Experts are looking into how, where and why the tank developed the leak.

Engineers from NAVFAC and FLC will participate in the joint Senate-House informational briefing to provide technical details about the status of Tank 5, operations and storage of bulk fuel, and latest monitoring technology as well as long-term plans.

The Navy is working with the State Department of Health and the City & County of Honolulu Board of Water Supply to maintain an open dialogue to ensure the safety of drinking water.

Wheeler said, “We take our environmental stewardship seriously – we all rely on fresh, safe drinking water for ourselves and our families. We take great pride in being part of the Hawai‘i community and we will continue to keep the public informed.”

He added, “We will continue to work closely with our City, State and Federal partners to assess, monitor and take every prudent action in order to protect public safety.”

The informational briefing is scheduled for tomorrow at 1 p.m. at the Hawai‘i State Capitol in Room 329.

Expected to attend, according to Sen. Gabbard's office:

- 1) Sen. Mike Gabbard, Kapolei-Makakilo (Chair, Energy & Environment; Education, Judiciary & Labor; Transportation & International Affairs)
- 2) Sen. Josh Greene, Naalehu-Kailua Kona (Chair, Health; Human Services; Public Safety; Intergovernmental & Military Affairs)
- 3) Sen. Will Espero, Ewa Beach-Iroquois Pt, Majority floor leader (Chair, Public Safety, Intergovernmental & Military Affairs; Ways & Means; Trans & International Affairs)
- 4) Rep. Chris Lee, Kailua-Lanikai-Waimanalo (Chair, Energy & Environmental Protection; Judiciary; Consumer Protection; Water & Land; Ocean Mgmt)
- 5) Rep. Dela Belatti, Moiliili-Makakiki-Tantalus (Chair, Health; Judiciary; Consumer Protection; Housing; Human Services)
- 6) Rep. Mark Takai, Halawa-Aiea-Newtown (Chair, Veterans, Military Affairs, International Affairs & Culture and the Arts; Education, Higher Education)