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Navy Red Hill Op-Ed to Star-Advertiser
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Red Hill Fuel Facility is a national strategic asset

We can do both: defend the nation and keep our drinking water safe

Rear Adm. John Fuller
Commander, Navy Region Hawaii and Naval Surface Group Middle Pacific

Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility is a safe, reliable and modernized facility...the Navy is absolutely committed to keeping our drinking water safe.

All of our families drink water from the same aquifers. We test water regularly, and it continues to meet or exceed federal and state drinking water quality standards.

Recently, the Environmental Protection Agency and State Department of Health held a public comment period to hear from citizens. During that time, out of respect for the process, the Navy refrained from speaking publicly. Now that the comment period is over, we are grateful for the opportunity to discuss the issues.

The Red Hill fuel facility is a national strategic asset, still essential for providing the fuel necessary to defend our nation, safeguard our national interests and support humanitarian missions overseas. When your military operates overseas, our forward presence ensures open sea lanes and the free flow of commerce to Hawaii, the mainland and beyond.

Although the facility was built 70 years ago, we have routinely upgraded it and it has state-of-the-art communication and inventory management systems. Each of the 20 fuel tanks was constructed with steel plates, backed by 2.5 to four feet of reinforced concrete and another six to eight inches of gunite, all surrounded by Red Hill's basalt rock.

Since 2006, the Navy and Defense Logistics Agency invested more than \$145 million to modernize Red Hill and for environmental testing, and we plan to invest another \$70

million in upgrades. This does not include any additional work that would be required by regulators through the Administrative Order on Consent.

Because of its location, Red Hill is a unique facility protected from both physical and cyber-attack. Inside the facility we use state-of-the-art machinery and we employ dozens of cameras for around-the-clock surveillance and security.

We test groundwater at several locations, conduct routine drinking supply compliance sampling and submit test results to regulatory agencies for review and evaluation. We are committed to putting in more groundwater monitoring wells, as necessary, in coordination with DOH and EPA.

The January 2014 leak in Tank 5 was found to be the result of faulty work by our contractor. Since then we have put in place new guidelines, processes and procedures, and we increased our oversight for contractor workmanship. Bottom line: We have instituted rigorous new safeguards to prevent a future fuel loss.

Tank 5 remains empty, and all tanks are passing industry standard tightness testing.

The Navy is continuing to work closely with EPA, DOH and community stakeholders. Since 2014 we have welcomed increased inspections at Red Hill, including oversight tours and familiarization visits with community leaders and elected officials.

I thank the community for your understanding and patience. We take responsibility for any environmental impacts the Red Hill fuel facility may have caused, and we are committed to keeping the community informed – with the facts.

Your Navy is working diligently toward a future with no reliance on fossil fuels – supporting the use of more renewables and moving forward to sustainable and reliable alternative energy sources.

Until that day, we are committed to energy security and the safe use of fossil fuels. Until we can move completely to a greener alternative, we must maintain Red Hill as part of our national defense strategy.

Our Navy is fully committed to environmental stewardship. And our non-negotiable priority remains keeping our drinking water safe.

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For more information about Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility:

<http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrh/om/environmental/red-hill-tank.html>

For more information about the Department of the Navy's approach to energy, environment and climate change: <http://greenfleet.dodlive.mil/>