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RED HILL CONTAMINATION

Water was 3 times the safe limit

By **Sophie Cocke**
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A water sample collected following a flushing operation at the Aliamanu Military Reservation, home to military families, detected petroleum hydrocarbons that were more than three times the state's acceptable limit.

The flushing was being conducted as part of the Navy's effort to clean jet fuel from its water system that serves about 93,000 Oahu residents in neighborhoods in and around Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.

The sample was collected by the Navy on Dec. 26, about a month after petroleum polluted the Navy's Red Hill drinking water well and began showing up in residents' faucets. Test results detected total petroleum hydrocarbons at 620 parts per billion. The Hawaii Department of Health has set the acceptable limit at 200 parts per billion for the ongoing emergency response. Total petroleum hydrocarbons is a term used to describe several hundred chemical compounds that derive from

crude oil.

The test results, which were released by the Department of Health on Friday, did not analyze the levels of specific chemicals found in petroleum that can pose a health threat, particularly with long-term exposure. These include chemicals such as benzene, a known carcinogen; xylene, which can irritate the eyes, nose, skin and throat; and naphthalene, which can cause liver and neurological damage.

Affected military families continue to report illnesses and symptoms they say

have been caused by their exposure to and ingestion of the contaminated water.

At a Saturday meeting in Waikiki held by Just Well Law, a firm encouraging affected residents to consider filing lawsuits against the Navy for making them sick, some participants reported that their symptoms continue to linger or have even become worse.

One woman, whose family lives at AMR, said her 16-year-old daughter on Nov. 27 began experiencing nonepileptic seizures, which have become worse and oc-

cur daily. She now faints regularly, the woman said. Her 8-year-old daughter, who has an allergic condition in her esophagus that causes her to throw up occasionally, now throws up daily, she said.

Jamie Simic, whose family lives in Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, said she was recently hospitalized because of "hydrocarbon toxicity" she believed was caused by the fuel-contaminated water. She said she developed lesions,

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KOKUA LINE



CHRISTINE
DONNELLY

CDC reports rising cases at nursing homes

Question: Has COVID-19 been rising again in Hawaii nursing homes? I can't find current information

RED HILL

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presumably caused by her exposure to the water.

Just Well Law is representing Simic's family and a handful of others who believe their illnesses are the Navy's fault and who want to file a claim against the Navy directly.

"If people got sick because of the water contamination, we know that the Navy caused that harm. So, the proper defendant, in my mind, for the people who were, is to bring a claim to the people who poisoned them, which is the Navy," said attorney Kristina Baehr, Just Well Law's founder.

The Department of Health continues to warn all residents on the Navy's water system not to drink the water or use it for cooking or

oral hygiene. If a fuel odor is detected in the water, residents should also avoid using it for bathing, dish-washing and laundry.

In response to the test result, the Navy reflushed its water distribution pipes in the area and new sampling is underway. If the new tests come back below DOH's threshold, the Navy will begin flushing and sampling individual homes and businesses.

The Navy informed residents over a week ago that a test result at Aliamanu Military Reservation had come back "dirty," and that there would be a delay in returning people to their homes as the area was reflushed. But officials had refused to release the actual test results, or say how high the exceedance was, until Friday. The lack of information had frustrated local military families, espe-



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cially since top Navy officials pledged during the early weeks of the water contamination emergency that they would immediately release test results to the public.

Last week, the Navy said that it couldn't release the results because they hadn't been approved by the Interagency Drinking Water System Team, which was formed on Dec. 17. The team includes officials from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, DOH, Army and

Navy, who are overseeing the restoration of safe drinking water.

DOH subsequently told the Honolulu Star-Advertiser that it would release the results for Aliamanu in the "interest of full transparency."

But officials have indicated that hundreds of other test results taken during the water flushing and sampling process will not be released until the process of cleaning an area's water is complete.

The flushing plan, which

breaks up neighborhoods into zones, is being done in increments. First, military officials are flushing the distribution system, which is expected to take 12 to 17 days. If testing shows the system is safe, officials will move on to flushing individual homes and businesses, which is expected to take another 25 to 27 days. Water samples from a portion of the homes, as well as every school, child development center and medical facility will then be sent to

mainland labs for testing.

After all the lab data is reviewed by the interagency team, DOH will then conduct a final review of the data before determining if the water is safe. Only then will the data be released publicly, according to a process outlined by the Navy on Jan. 13.

Top Navy officials had hoped that some families who have been displaced due to the water contamination could begin returning home earlier this month, but that's not been the case.

Residents of Pearl City Peninsula could resume full use of their water beginning Jan. 28, according to the Navy's latest projections. But the target for most residents is now mid-February.

Star-Advertiser reporter Mark Ladao contributed to this story.