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CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

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November 12, 2024

Ms. Martha Guzman
Regional Administrator
United States Environmental Protection Agency
Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

And

Kenneth S. Fink, MD, MGA, MPH
Director
Hawaii State Department of Health
1250 Punchbowl Street
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Ms. Guzman and Dr. Fink:

**Subject: Honolulu Board of Water Supply (BWS) Response to State of Hawaii
Department of Health (DOH) and United States Environmental Protection
Agency (EPA) Letter dated October 17, 2024**

The BWS is in receipt of the October 17, 2024 letter sent by the EPA and DOH (collectively, the "Regulatory Agencies") responding to seven previous BWS letters commenting on a range of topics related to the United States Department of the Navy's (Navy) Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility (RHBFSF) and Navy Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam (JBPHH) drinking water system (EPA and DOH, 2024). These BWS letters commented on detections of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in the BWS Aiea Wells, the Navy's RHBFSF Tank Closure Plan, Supplement 3, the Navy's per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) release draft Work Plan, the BWS' request for weekly sampling of Navy monitoring wells and production wells, and public testimony received by the BWS on lead detections in the Navy's JBPHH drinking water system. The BWS looks forward to receiving your detailed response to these many prior comment letters, as you indicated would be forthcoming in separate correspondence.

The BWS recognizes the regulatory authority of the EPA and DOH as it pertains to protecting human health and the environment and overseeing public water systems, and trusts that EPA and DOH will continue to ensure that Oahu's drinking water supply remains safe for use and consumption. The BWS takes seriously its own responsibility to protect the irreplaceable sole-source groundwater aquifer that nourishes Oahu's drinking water supply and will continue to monitor the Navy's work at Red Hill and to evaluate the data that is publicly available. The BWS is committed to making certain that the RHBFSF is closed properly, expeditiously and safely, and that the Navy's past releases of petroleum hydrocarbons and PFAS are fully characterized and remediated as quickly and thoroughly as possible. The BWS cannot allow contamination to enter the BWS drinking water system or to put at risk our customers and ratepayers.

The BWS notes that the EPA and DOH's letter expressly references the DOH's 2022 Emergency Order (EO) and the EPA's 2023 Administrative Consent Order (ACO) as authority empowering the Regulatory Agencies to require that the Navy and the U.S. Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) take action to protect Oahu's drinking water supply. It is our understanding, and one that we believe is shared by the EPA (EPA, 2023), that the 2015 Administrative Order on Consent (AOC) will continue to serve as the primary means for the Regulatory Agencies to oversee the remediation of the environmental impacts at and around Red Hill. The BWS requests clarification as to (1) whether anything has changed such that a reference to the 2015 AOC reference was omitted from your recent letter, and (2) whether and to what extent the 2015 AOC and its accompanying Statement of Work (SOW) has been modified based on the DOH 2022 EO and the EPA 2023 ACO or otherwise. As you know, the BWS is extremely concerned about the pace (or lack thereof) of the Navy's investigation and remediation of releases from the RHBFSF and we look forward to working with the Regulatory Agencies to the extent we can assist you in expediting this process.

PAH Detections in BWS Aiea Wells

The BWS understands and has been clear that the source for recent PAH detections in Aiea Wells is currently uncertain. The BWS, however, disagrees that there is conclusive scientific evidence to demonstrate that the PAHs did not come from the RHBFSF. We respectfully ask that the EPA and DOH present the scientific evidence that the Regulatory Agencies believe supports their position to the BWS in its entirety. The data or analyses we have seen to date, including the information presented by the DOH at the October 2024 Fuel Tank Advisory Committee (FTAC) meeting, do not provide this evidence. Moreover, the position taken by the Regulatory Agencies appears to be incomplete, and the BWS respectfully requests that EPA and DOH consider surfactant use at RHBFSF and its potential to mobilize contaminants into the sole-source aquifer in connection with any ongoing or future investigation of the PAH detections in wells in the vicinity of Red Hill, including out-of-service BWS wells (Lau, 2024).

Navy's Tank Closure Plan – Supplement 3

The BWS supports the Regulatory Agencies' decision not to approve the Navy's proposal to close the RHBFSF tanks in place at this time. We understand that your approval has not been granted, at least in part, because the Navy has not made it clear "what infrastructure would be altered or removed so that the tank systems can never be used to store hazardous substances." The BWS implores the Regulatory Agencies to go farther and reiterates its position, as outlined in our July 16, 2024 letter, that closure with the tanks remaining in place is completely unacceptable. Indeed, we continue to encourage the Regulatory Agencies to require that the Navy implement tank closure alternative 4 (ALT 4), which requires the removal of tank steel, filling each tank cavity with an inert material, and the removal of all pipelines as the selected closure method.

Draft Remedial Investigation Work Plan PFAS Release

Based on your October 17 letter, the BWS understands that the Regulatory Agencies are currently waiting for the Navy to submit a revised Draft Remediation Investigation Work Plan for PFAS investigation at Red Hill. The BWS would appreciate an update from the Regulatory Agencies as to the schedule related to the ongoing Red Hill PFAS investigation. Specifically, we would like to know when the BWS can expect to be provided with a copy of this revised Work Plan for our technical review and comment as a subject matter expert. Furthermore, the Regulatory Agencies have acknowledged receipt of our PFAS comment letter dated August 7, 2024, and, as a follow-up request, the BWS respectfully asks that the EPA and DOH require the Navy address our comments in their upcoming PFAS Work Plan submittal.

Lead detections, School Notifications, and Mass Spectrometer Analyses

The BWS thanks the Regulatory Agencies for providing a summary of the main points from the Red Hill Community Representation Initiative (CRI) Meeting No. 12 where lead detections in the JBPHH water system were discussed. The BWS is currently preparing a comment letter concerning the Navy's Extended Drinking Water Monitoring (EBWM) Plan and will send it to the Regulatory Agencies under separate cover.

Data Sharing and Red Hill Sampling Frequency

The BWS does not disagree, and in fact has commented numerous times over the last several years in both public and private forums, that the information made available to the public and the BWS is incomplete. As noted in some of the referenced letters and numerous others, BWS has regularly and relentlessly requested detailed information related to, among other things, historic operations at the RHBFSF, the various versions of Navy groundwater models, model inputs and model simulations, the levels of contamination detected in the aquifer, and plans for remediating contamination. When such information is provided by the Regulatory Agencies or the Navy, it is often highly

redacted and, therefore, presents incomplete data and analysis. We strongly disagree, however, that presentations made by the BWS are confusing or misleading to the public. The BWS carefully reviews all information available, utilizes highly-skilled technical teams to analyze this information and is transparent regarding the analyses conducted and the conclusions derived therefrom. As noted, the BWS does at times have to make some assumptions regarding missing data, but the BWS always explains such assumptions and their import to the analysis presented. The BWS welcomes the opportunity to work with the Regulatory Agencies to ensure that it has access to complete information to inform its analysis and to help the public understand the current conditions.

We agree with the Regulatory Agencies that the sharing of all available data would provide the most complete information for understanding the condition of our irreplaceable groundwater aquifer, its flow, and the extent of the contamination caused by releases from the RHBFSF. The Navy should no longer be allowed to withhold any information critical to understanding and evaluating the extent of the environmental contamination caused by military operations at the RHBFSF. Continued requests for the BWS to enter into a nondisclosure agreement are counterproductive and as recognized by the EPA in your October 17, 2024, letter, wholly unnecessary to facilitate the sharing of environmental data and analyses. The BWS reiterates its longstanding request that we be provided with all environmental data, information, and analyses related to the RHBFSF in unredacted form.

The lack of timely and complete information sharing by the Navy directly impacts our ability to determine the ultimate fate and transport of pollutants from the RHBFSF, evaluate the extent of the resulting groundwater contamination, and assess the risks of this contamination reaching BWS drinking water wells. More egregiously, the BWS cannot even rely upon Navy deliverables to bridge the data gap because, despite having a decade to do so, the Navy still has not completed (or made available for subject matter expert or public review) a defensible conceptual site model or groundwater model. Indeed, the Navy's latest September 24, 2024, RHBFSF groundwater model report suffers from the same overredaction of environmental information (e.g., pumping locations and rates), as previously-rejected Navy modeling reports. The Navy should reproduce its September 2024 RHBFSF groundwater model report in unredacted form so that the public and subject matter experts like the BWS can ensure that the data collected and analyses prepared by the Navy inform critical water use planning and resource management priorities for the people of Oahu.

In the absence of sound technical analyses, there is a real need for increased sampling frequency of Red Hill monitoring wells and Navy production wells. Accordingly, we stand on our prior request for the Regulatory Agencies to require the Navy to conduct weekly sampling of all such wells for laboratory analysis of all of the contaminants of concern, including PFAS (as we understand that only a subset of Navy wells are tested on a quarterly basis for PFAS). The BWS strongly recommends that all Navy wells,

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including the 38 Navy monitoring wells referenced in your October 17, 2024, letter, be tested on a weekly basis for PFAS. While the BWS did not specifically request that any independent third-party to conduct this testing, the BWS does believe that independent sampling and laboratory verification by a third-party analytical chemist that is not employed by the Department of Defense would help to promote transparency and increase the level of public confidence in the Navy's reported water sampling results. We further request that, for our own confidence in understanding regional groundwater quality, BWS personnel be permitted to collect our own water samples during the weekly Navy sampling and use our contract laboratory to perform additional analytical testing.

Closing

Although we may not always agree on every Red Hill issue, the BWS appreciates its longstanding, collaborative relationship with the EPA and DOH. By working together, we can all do our part to safeguard Oahu's water supply so that safe and dependable drinking water remains available for present and future generations. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Erwin Kawata, Deputy Manager, at (808) 748-5066.

Very truly yours,


ERNEST Y.W. LAU, P.E.
Manager and Chief Engineer

cc: Rear Admiral Stephen Barnett
Commander
Navy Region Hawai'i
850 Ticonderoga Street, Suite 110
JBPHH, Hawai'i 96860-5101

Mr. Nā'ālehu Anthony, BWS Board Chair

References

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