



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

January 20, 2022

TO: The Honorable Catherine Payne
Chairperson, Board of Education

FROM: Keith T. Hayashi 
Interim Superintendent

SUBJECT: **Presentation on Red Hill Water Contamination Effects on Department of Education Schools, Staff, Students, and Community**

1. BACKGROUND

During the week of November 29, 2021, the Hawaii State Department of Education (Department) was notified of fuel smells coming from potable water sources at multiple schools. The Department responded to and researched the situation. Seven schools were identified as being supplied by the United States Navy Facilities Engineering Systems Command (NAVFAC). The schools, complex area offices, and the Department coordinated the shutdown of the contaminated water supply and the logistics of replacement water.

2. UPDATE

The following is the Department's response to the Board's inquiry regarding the Red Hill water supply situation and its impact on the Department schools.

- **Information on the Board and Department of Education's jurisdictional authority in this matter.**

The Department will defer to and work with the Department of the Attorney General to determine its authority, if any, regarding the supply of water to its schools.

- **Information on the various agencies and governmental entities with jurisdiction over this matter.**

The Department of Health's (DOH) Safe Water Drinking Branch provides oversight and safeguards to ensure Hawaii's drinking water sources are protected. Agencies such as NAVFAC and the Honolulu Board of Water Supply have been working with the DOH's Safe Water Drinking Branch. During the course of this crisis, the DOH has provided guidance and information to the Department.

- **Information on the schools affected and the extent to which they are affected, including, but not limited to, student and staff well-being, academic interference, and financial impacts.**

The following schools are supplied water through NAVFAC:

1. Red Hill Elementary School;
2. Nimitz Elementary School;
3. Pearl Harbor Elementary School;
4. Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School;
5. Iroquois Point Elementary School;
6. Hickam Elementary School; and
7. Mokulele Elementary School.

Per the DOH's guidance, all water use was shut down. The Office of Facilities and Operations (OFO) has been providing potable water to affected schools since December 1, 2021 for cooking and food preparation, hand washing and drinking purposes. Since December 15, 2021, water costs have totaled approximately \$15,000 across the seven schools. This has included 670 five-gallon containers of purified water and 144 three-gallon containers of purified water. The military has also provided water buffalo tanks, hand-washing stations and bottled water to some of the impacted schools. Water continues to be a need for the affected schools.

One of the unintended consequences of the need for bottled water is the additional burden this has had on the schools' staff, which were already impacted by COVID-19. Custodians have had to fill hand-washing stations; teachers have had to help students with makeshift hand-washing stations to ensure proper hand hygiene; and school staff have had to deliver bottled water to classrooms, all adding unexpected tasks for the school staff. Fortunately, military personnel have provided assistance with these efforts.

Initially, before potable water was made available for food prep and dishwashing, schools were using a combination of fresh, frozen and pre-packaged items for modifications to breakfast and lunch menus. Fresh produce items were maintained where possible. With potable water provided for food preparation and dishwashing, schools have transitioned back to regular breakfast and lunch menu options.

Some families were relocated to hotels throughout Honolulu. The military coordinated the operation with guidance from OFO. The military covered all costs for these services including student transportation to and from school.

Other families who have secured other accommodations have had challenges in finding transportation to school. This has impacted school attendance, which in turn affects student learning already impacted by the pandemic. As families move out of the school community, school enrollment will be negatively affected.

The DOH is currently working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to conduct health assessment surveys of affected students, staff, and the surrounding communities. A team of federal epidemiologists will come to Hawaii to oversee these surveys.

The Department appreciates the work that the affected schools have done to manage the public education services for the families of their military communities. Only one complaint was received regarding the schools' response to the situation, which is a testament to the work that the schools, their respective complex areas, and OFO has done to alleviate this issue.

- **Any description on any measures put in place to mitigate health and safety issues in schools.**

School, complex area and state office leaders have been closely working together as well as with military officials and the DOH to ensure we protect the health and safety of students and staff throughout this response. To minimize disruption to student learning, we prioritized keeping campuses open while implementing safety protocols.

Per the DOH's guidance, all affected schools stopped using the water for hand or face washing, dish washing, cooking or drinking. The OFO coordinated the delivery of bottled water to these schools. Hand-washing equipment and stations were also provided as recommended by the DOH. The Aiea-Moanalua-Radford complex area personnel provided support and coordination among all schools, state offices, and the military.

- **Any description of support being provided by the Navy and whether this support is sufficient.**

Currently, the U.S. Army and Navy are providing water and bulk water containers (also known as water buffalo tanks) to the affected schools, which has been sufficient. They are also providing labor to help distribute the water.

The Department is working with the DOH and the U.S. Navy on possible reimbursement of costs incurred during this crisis.

Thank you for your continued support of our schools and their school community during this challenging time.

KTH:rt
c: Office of Facilities and Operations