

# Navy recommends water system residents avoid ingestion as a precaution if odors are present

Hawaii Public Radio | By [Scott Kim](#), [Sophia McCullough](#)

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*Jason Gillman From Divebox /*

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The U.S. Navy recommended Monday night that Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam military housing residents avoid ingestion of their potable water as a cautionary measure "if chemical or petroleum odors are present."



Over the weekend, residents of military housing near the base reported a "chemical smell" in their tap water, prompting the Navy to investigate.

Navy and Hawai'i Department of Health tests from water samples at various locations in the area, including military housing, "have not detected petroleum constituents in initial testing," the Navy said Monday night.

"More stringent tests are being conducted by qualified independent water testing labs on the mainland to ensure water purity meets EPA standards."

The Navy said those results are expected later this week. On Sunday, the Navy said there was no "immediate indication" that the water is unsafe.

Meanwhile, the Navy said residents should report any chemical or petroleum odors associated with their potable water.

The state Department of Health went a step further Monday and recommended that "all Navy water system users avoid using the water for drinking, cooking, or oral hygiene."

"Navy water system users who detect a fuel odor from their water should avoid using the water for drinking, cooking, bathing, dishwashing, laundry or oral hygiene," the health department said

On Monday, Holy Family Catholic Academy and Preschool shut its doors Monday in an abundance of caution. Red Hill Elementary and Nimitz Elementary remained open but they taped off their sinks, handed out bottled water to students, and prepared lunches without using water.

State Rep. Sonny Ganaden, who represents the area, said his office received numerous complaints about the issue.

"What we're hoping is that residents of Pearl Harbor aren't the canary in the coal mine — that they aren't the first ones that will be affected by a fuel leak into Honolulu's water

biggest concern for me as a state legislator who has sworn to uphold the state constitution which protects water for all of our constituents."



A military wife and mom living in the area, who asked not to be identified, told [HPR's The Conversation](#) that there was a run on bottled water at nearby stores Monday.

"I'm leaving the Salt Lake Target right now, I'm in my car. It was madness, they have no more water to put out on the floor because people are like panic buying all the bottled water," she said. "We're being told that there's no evidence that it's unsafe, but when we turn on the tap, it smells – it's like diesel fuel in our water, it's jet fuel coming out of our tap."

The commander of Joint Base Pearl Harbor – Hickam sent a message to residents in the military housing communities Monday, reaffirming their commitment to investigating the complaints. Capt. Erik Spitzer said he and his staff were drinking the water – some staff members also live in the housing and were using the water as well.

The Navy is already dealing with the fallout from [several fuel leaks](#) at its Red Hill fuel storage facility. Last week a [coalition of environmental groups](#) said it would encourage the Pentagon and White House to shut down the facility over worries that further leaks will endanger one of the city's major aquifers.

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## Scott Kim

Scott Kim has spent most of his career in the NPR system, having served as a reporter, host and news director at Hawai'i Public Radio from 1991 through 1997, before moving on to spend fifteen years at NPR affiliates WMFE in Orlando (where he was hired by José A. Fajardo) and WJCT in Jacksonville. He was born and raised in Hawai'i, and graduated from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa with a degree in broadcast journalism.

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Sophia McCullough is HPR's digital news producer.

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