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Hawaii State Department of Health Clean Water Branch unveils new beach monitoring website with up-to-date status reports

Upgrades provide easier navigation and more information

HONOLULU -- The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) Clean Water Branch has developed a newly upgraded website that gives the public access to up-to-date information — integrated with aerial photos from Google maps — to check on the status of the water quality of beaches that may have a surge in bacteria levels or are being impacted by sewage spills. This website is part of a revised statewide beach monitoring and notification system.

The new features and functions of the website (<http://health.hawaii.gov/cwb>), developed in part from a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), were based on feedback from those within the health department as well as external stakeholders. The website is part of an integrated notification system that includes warning signs posted at selected beaches throughout the state.

“This was a collaborative effort within the Department of Health and with others in the community,” said Keith Kawaoka, DOH deputy director of environmental health. “The input we received allowed us to develop a much more robust beach monitoring and notification system that will serve as a valuable tool for the community.”

Kawaoka noted the website upgrade is part of a larger, more comprehensive program to eliminate manual processes and automate data analysis. “This is just the beginning; there’s more to come,” he said. “In the future, we’ll be able to use the data to improve efficiency in the beach warning notification system and use the data for other purposes.”

For example, once it is fully optimized, the new system will automatically generate the advisory text with the location details. The system will alert the Clean Water Branch staff of the pending advisory so it can be reviewed and submitted with one click. With the current system, CWB staff must manually input the advisory and location details and manually transmit the email notifications. In addition, the information on the website and the email notifications are part of two different systems. The new system will make all advisory text consistent and integrate email notifications and website information in a single system.

“The State of Hawaii has taken an important step to ensure public safety by promptly notifying the public about potential human health risks and improving access to beach monitoring data,” said Tomas Torres, Director of the Water Division at EPA’s Pacific Southwest Region. “The

DOH's partnership with Surfrider and other stakeholders exemplifies a notable bottom-up collaboration that results in tangible human health and environmental protection for residents and visitors in Hawaii."

Background

In 2000, the Beaches Environmental Assessment and Coastal Health (BEACH) Act became an amendment to the federal Clean Water Act, establishing national standard criteria for coastal recreational water monitoring and public notification of possible pollution at beaches. As an eligible coastal state, Hawaii receives an annual EPA BEACH Act grant to implement the BEACH program. For this new federal fiscal year, which began Oct. 1, 2017, the Department of Health received \$265,000 from the EPA to operate the statewide program.

The Hawaii Department of Health Clean Water Branch is required to establish a beach monitoring program and to provide public notification whenever indicator bacteria levels exceed a specified threshold level. This includes beach advisories for beaches that experience temporary or permanent elevations of bacteria, sewage spills, or brown water advisories following rainy weather that cause runoff to the beaches. The website complements the physical posting of signs on the beaches and the onsite notifications by the county lifeguards.

"This new website allows us to give accurate and timely information to Hawaii's visitor industry," said Bob Hampton, chairman of the board, Waikiki Beach Activities. "The maps show visitors who are thinking about vacationing in Hawaii how water quality concerns are limited to a specific beach and do not affect the entire island. The closure notifications that an advisory is no longer active also gives an all-clear assurance to visitors that it is OK to enjoy the beach."

Features of New Website

The new site provides a number of features and functions. Viewers are now able to subscribe to email updates on all beach advisories to receive on their computers or mobile devices. As part of the public notification system, the website offers the ability to:

- See a quick overview of all active advisories in a single list;
- Click on a pin icon on the map of the Hawaiian Islands to view details from a specific advisory;
- See the types of warning signs posted at a beach and specific locations where they are posted on the beach;
- View any documents, pictures, or files of beach posted by the Clean Water Branch team; and
- Receive notifications when an advisory is closed and no longer active.

Media and others interested in conducting research on a specific beach are able to:

- Sort advisories by island or their status, whether they are active or closed;
- View, in table form, all current and past advisories, the type of advisories that were issued, and the island; and
- Download advisory information into an Excel file.

In the future, the new system will allow users to:

- Select the type of advisories they wish to receive;
- Select the specific island for which an advisory is posted; and
- Opt to receive text messaging for advisories.

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