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DOH to increase air monitoring and sampling during Lahaina debris removal

HONOLULU – The Hawaiʻi Department of Health (DOH) is increasing air monitoring and sampling in Lahaina and Olowalu as Phase II debris removal commences. The increased air monitoring and sampling are being conducted to ensure that U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) debris removal activities do not significantly impact air quality. The sampling and monitoring will continue throughout the debris removal work.

“Real-time air monitoring and air sampling will provide the community with additional data and assist the department in assessing whether debris removal or other activities are impacting air quality,” said Deputy Director for Environmental Health Kathleen Ho. “DOH conducted similar sampling in Kula and found that debris removal did not significantly impact air quality. However, it’s important to remember that air monitoring and sampling are indicative of the ambient air quality at the time the samples were collected. When in an impacted area, where cleanup activities could cause hazardous dust and ash to become airborne and exposure risk may be high, people should wear a well-fitting N95 or higher-rated mask and other personal protective equipment.”

DOH has currently installed a total of 40 real-time air monitors and air samplers in Lahaina and Olowalu. DOH staff deployed four additional real-time air monitors on January 18 and will continue to augment Maui’s air monitoring network as USACE debris removal work expands and continues.

The real-time monitors measure PM 2.5, particulate matter that is 0.0025 millimeters and smaller in size (about 30 times smaller than the diameter of a human hair) that can be a component of ash, dust, smoke, and air pollution.

Data from the real-time air monitors is available at https://fire.airnow.gov/. Air-quality data is also available on third-party mobile applications such as the iQAir AirVisual app.

Contaminants of concern, such as metals like lead or arsenic, stick to the pieces of ash and dust that register as PM 2.5. Because of this, air monitoring for PM 2.5 can be used as an indicator for contaminant monitoring. If PM 2.5 measurements are not above typical baseline levels, then ash and dust from the impacted areas with their associated contaminants, are not in the air in any measurable amount that would be considered harmful. Elevated PM 2.5 readings could also be attributed to car exhaust, chimney smoke, outdoor cooking/smoking of food, and activities like yard work and wood chipping.

On January 14, the DOH also began conducting air sampling in Lahaina to test for specific contaminants in the air. After the sampling is completed, samples are sent to a certified laboratory for analysis. Due to the lab turnaround time, the first sampling reports are expected in February.

Air monitoring, sampling, and testing will continue to be conducted in Lahaina for PM 2.5, PM 10, asbestos, and metals, including antimony, arsenic, barium, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, cobalt, copper, lead, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, selenium, thallium, vanadium, and zinc. DOH will make the sampling reports available to the public as they are received.

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