



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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In reply, please refer to:
File:

Report to the Legislature – Relating to Cesspools and Prioritization for Replacement

What are cesspools?

- Cesspools are little more than holes in the ground that collect and discharge raw, untreated human waste. Cesspools can contaminate ground water, drinking water sources, streams and oceans with disease-causing pathogens.

How many cesspools do we have in Hawai`i?

- There are approximately 88,000 cesspools in the State, with nearly 50,000 located on the Big Island, almost 14,000 on Kauai, over 12,000 on Maui, over 11,000 on Oahu and over 1,400 on Molokai.

What is Act 125?

- Act 125 was passed in the 2017 legislative session and require the replacement of all cesspools by 2050. It directs the Hawaii Department of Health (DOH) to evaluate residential cesspools in the state, develop a Report to the Legislature that includes a prioritization method for cesspool upgrades, and work with the Department of Taxation on possible funding options to reduce the financial burden on homeowners.

How many cesspools pose a risk to our water resources in Hawaii?

- The Report to the Legislature – Relating to Cesspools and Prioritization for Replacement identifies 14 areas in the state where an evaluation of data on hand indicates greatest need for action. These areas include approximately 43,000 cesspools.
- The Report identifies 4 priority categories. **Priority 1** are areas where cesspools present a Significant Risk of Human Impacts, Drinking Water Impacts, or Draining to Sensitive Waters. **Priority 2** are areas where cesspools present a Potential to Impact Drinking Water. **Priority 3** are areas where cesspools have the Potential to Impact Sensitive Waters in our state. **Priority 4** is a placeholder for all cesspools whose impacts DOH have yet to fully analyze.
- The highest priority for action is located in Upcountry Maui. There is no evidence of bacterial contamination in the drinking water in Upcountry Maui after chlorine disinfection. However, the presence of nitrates in the drinking water indicates that 7,400 cesspools are impacting the drinking water sources in this community.

- Although the nitrates in upcountry Maui are elevated, and could present a specific public health concern if pollutant levels were to increase, it is important to note that nitrate levels are currently below the protective human health standard set by the Environmental Protection Agency and DOH (the “maximum contaminant level” for nitrates in drinking water is 10 mg/L).

How can I get a copy of the report?

- The Report is available for download from the following website:
<https://health.hawaii.gov/opppd/files/2017/12/Act-125-HB1244-HD1-SD3-CD1-29th-Legislature-Cesspool-Report.pdf>

Who do I contact if I have questions about the report or cesspools in general?

- Contact our Safe Drinking Water Branch at (808) 586-4258 or email at sdwb@doh.hawaii.gov for questions or concerns about the quality of the drinking water in Upcountry Maui.
- Contact our Wastewater Branch at (808) 586-4294 or email at wwb@doh.hawaii.gov for all other questions.