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Medical Waste Clean-up Efforts Underway

More Medical Waste Wash Up On West Shores 5 Days After Landfill Spill

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KALAELOA, Hawaii -- Five days after the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill spilled medical waste into the ocean, efforts are underway to clean up the waste that's still washing up on Oahu's west shores.

Waste Management Hawaii general manager Joe Whelan said his crews have been out cleaning the shores everyday since the spill.

But concern over the spilled medical waste is spreading, just as the debris that's been found miles from the outfall.

Robert and Barbara Billand showed off what they found after combing White Plains and Nimitz Beaches.

Two plastic bags of used syringes, scissors and used vials that appeared to have blood inside.

"This one has liquid in it. We got a whole bunch of small needles in there," said Robert Billand.

The Billands are most concerned about a monk seal named Benny who was last seen swimming in the area two days ago, but they say they're cleaning the beaches for everyone.

"We don't want to step on this. We don't want the seals to get hurt and we don't want the general public to get hurt on it," said Billand.

City waste management workers were out at White Plains beach, but said they didn't find any medical waste on the shores Monday.

But 4 miles away at Pokai Bay, city lifeguards found four syringes on the shore.

"That's encouraging that this is the end of this. But we're still being vigilant and we have our folks out there as we speak, looking and helping to make sure that we're done with this," said Jim Ireland, Honolulu Emergency Services Department acting director.

Lifeguards at west side beaches have been given containers to collect any more medical waste they find.

Ireland said crews will continue the extra beach cleaning for at least another week.

Honolulu City Councilwoman Tulsi Gabbard Tamayo and a small team of volunteers were out at Pokai Bay helping clean the beach.

Gabbard Tamayo is concerned that not enough attention is being spent on the result of the landfill spill.

"We can't just look at the point of output and be totally focused on that. We need to be thinking outside the box and look at what's really happening on the ground here," said Gabbard Tamayo.

The Billands are just one of many frustrated at the lack of action in cleaning up efforts.

"If this was Waikiki, they'd be out there in force cleaning up the beaches. But we're out in the country. Anything goes in the country, they don't care," said Robert Billand.

Late Monday afternoon, the city's managing director Douglas Chin held a news conference on the cleanup.

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Chin was also standing in as mayor, since Peter Carlisle is Washington for a mayor's conference.

The acting mayor met with state health officials and the Environmental Protection Agency at the landfill and also checked some leeward coast beaches to see first hand what kind of trash was washing onshore.

"It is serious, but certainly at the same time I think there is a serious response that is being taken by the various agencies," said Chin.

The city's permit to operate the landfill expires in July of 2012 and these latest problems are giving more ammunition to those who want to see it shutdown.

Chin said members of a new landfill site committee is to meet for the first time on Thursday.

"They are supposed to look at all the sites all round Oahu and report back their recommendations to us," said Chin.

The city said bacterial levels in the ocean are diminishing and officials once again emphasized that the medical waste that overflowed from the landfill was sanitized.

They say anyone who finds medical waste should call the waste management hotline at (808) 668-2985.

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