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Honolulu

2:40

## Landfill succumbs to rain, spills trash into ocean at Ko Olina

Posted: Jan 14, 2011 3:12 PM

Updated: Jan 14, 2011 9:07 PM

By Brooks Baehr - bio | email

Workers from Waimanalo Gulch Landfill picked up medical waste and other trash from the coast at Ko Olina Friday. And city workers collected water samples to be tested for contaminants.

Rain from a storm late Wednesday and early Thursday overwhelmed the sediment holding pond at the landfill. Water poured over the banks of the pond carrying garbage from the landfill through storm drains and into the ocean at Ko Olina.

"This should not have happened. There's not supposed to be storm water running over a landfill and certainly a landfill is not supposed to erode and put garbage into the ocean," said Gary Gill, deputy director with the state Department of Health.

"Any visible garbage that's left the site and is on the beach needs to be cleaned up. Aside from just removing the viewable floatables, the trash, any kind of medical waste that might be out there, you'll be wondering about contaminants whether they be chemical or biological," Gill added.

Waimanalo Gulch Landfill is owned by the city. It is operated by a Waste Management. The company is in the process of upgrading its drainage system, but said Friday those upgrades were still three weeks from being finished when the storm hit.

Waste Management general manager Joe Whelan said the landfill usually sees between 12 and 15 inches of rain a year. Close to 11 inches fell during the mid-week storm.

"You're talking an awful lot of water accumulating that we normal don't see. So, I mean, you have to put things into perspective. It's similar to having a tsunami coming off the hillside," said Tim Steinberger, director of the city Department of Environmental Services.

Beaches at the Ko Olina resort are closed and warning signs have been posted near the outfall below the landfill warning people the water is likely contaminated.

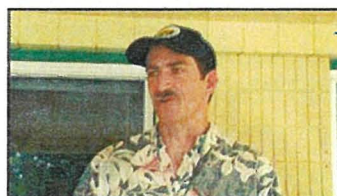
The incident has renewed calls for the landfill to be closed.

"It is abundantly clear that the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill needs to be closed. No amount of 'best management practices' can mitigate the adverse impacts this landfill operation has on the surrounding environment, including the community's health and welfare," said Ken Williams, of the Ko Olina Community Association.

The landfill is closed until the water recedes. Normal automated curb-side trash pick-up will continue as usual, but the city is temporarily suspending its bulky trash pick-up. Steinberger urges people not to put large items out for pick-up until the landfill is re-opened.



Joe Whelan



Gary Gill



Tim Steinberger

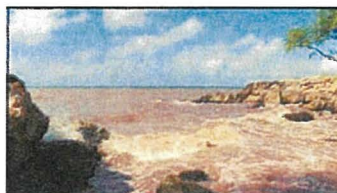


EXHIBIT K99 at 1

## Needles And Blood Filled Vials

Reported by: Andrew Pereira

Email: [apereira@khon2.com](mailto:apereira@khon2.com)

Published: 1/14 7:38 pm

Updated: 1/14 8:18 pm



 Slideshow

The state Health Department and city officials are investigating the discharge of medical waste from Waimanalo Gulch Landfill Thursday after more than eleven inches of rain fell in the area.

The debris that washed up behind Ko Olina Resort included blood filled vials, syringes and hypodermic needles. All of the lagoons at Ko Olina were closed Friday and warning signs are posted along the shoreline as far west as the Kahe Power Plant.

"Obviously this situation should never have happened," said Deputy State Health Director Gary Gill. "The landfill is supposed to be designed to divert any flood waters that come from the mauka areas and push those waters around the side of the landfill."

According to landfill General Manager Joe Whelan of Waste Management, runoff from Thursday night's storm gathered inside a cell that has been collecting solid municipal waste since October.

The new cell is part of a 93 acre expansion of Waimanalo Gulch that was approved by the state Land Use Commission in September of 2009. The LUC granted a permit that allows the landfill to collect solid municipal waste until July 31, 2012.

Whelan said any medical waste received by the landfill must be sterilized.

"The process is if someone does have that particular product they have to fill out a profile and have it pre-approved with us and then when we take it, we bury it in the landfill."

Friday morning about a dozen temporary workers hired by Waste Management were seen collecting medical waste from the rocky shoreline at Ko Olina, where two large pipes from the landfill lead to the ocean.

"Syringes, needles, blood vials - all kind stuff," said one unidentified worker, when asked about what was collected so far.

The workers, who are being paid \$9 an hour, were given a half hour lecture about the proper way to handle medical waste before being dropped off at the shoreline with what they were told were puncture proof gloves.

The vice president of Ko Olina Resort said the current situation is another example of why so many Leeward Coast residents, including resort developer Jeff Stone, have urged the city to close the landfill once and for all.

"It is abundantly clear that the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill needs to be closed," said Ken Williams. "No amount of 'best management practices' can mitigate the adverse impacts this landfill operation has on the surrounding environment, including the community's health and welfare."

Williams urged decision makers to adhere to the 2009 order that would close the landfill to solid municipal waste in about a year –and-a-half.

Meanwhile Waste Management is in the process of building a new collection system designed to divert future flood waters around the main body of the landfill. The structure includes a fourteen foot high headwall at the top of the gulch, six foot piping running along the entire western edge of the landfill and another two acre flood basin at the bottom.

Whelan said completion of the entire project will take another three to four months.

"All the water that currently flows through the landfill on a major storm will now be diverted all the way around the landfill."

The city's Environmental Services director told Khon2 the city would review whether or not medical waste should continue to be dumped in the landfill. However Tim Steinberger cautioned that Thursday's event was the result of "a hundred year storm."

**EXHIBIT K99 at 2**

"We haven't had a rain like this ever," said Steinberger. "This is the first time in recorded history. The (storms) in December broke all the records from 1955."

According to National Weather Service meteorologist Derek Wroe, a rain gauge located at Waimanalo Gulch Landfill has been operational for about a year. However based on a gauge nearby, Wroe believes the city's assertion about the severity of the storm is not too far off base.

"I don't know how they determined that standard but that doesn't seem like an unreasonable number," said Wroe. "A nearby gauge shows a hundred year storm at 12.08 inches in a twenty-four period and 10.88 inches for a fifty year storm."

Regardless of the circumstances that lead to the discharge of storm water from the landfill Gill said medical waste should never end up strewn across a shoreline.

"Certainly no waste, medical or otherwise, is supposed to leave this landfill," he said.

The city's Clean Water Branch as well as Waste Management collected water samples from the ocean where medical waste was found as well as the basin that was overwhelmed with flood waters.

Results of the testing should be available in about a week. In the meantime the state Health Department has begun an investigation that includes possible assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Any violations of the rules or the permits can lead to a fine," said Gill, when asked about landfill operations. "That's an investigation that's ongoing and I can't talk to you in any specifics at this point."

Under permit guidelines issued by DOH the landfill is permitted to discharge storm water into the ocean, however any runoff is supposed to be filtered to remove any debris.

On December 19 Waste Management discharged an estimated 7.5 million gallons of storm runoff into the ocean after the area received about five inches of rain.

The city could not immediately provide an estimate of how much storm water was discharged into the ocean during Thursday's weather event.

**RESIDENTS EXPRESS OUTRAGE**

A longtime Nanakuli resident was among the first to express outrage at the dumping of medical waste into the ocean.

Jojan Barrett wrote a letter to her state senator and representative urging something be done to protect those who live in the area.

"It terrifies me to know what goes into (what us Hawaiians call) our "ice box" the ocean and onto our table tops and is further ingested by our people," Barrett wrote. "My children and the keikis of our community are in the ocean everyday as that's our way of life as Kanaka Maolis in Nanakuli."

*Have a news tip? Contact Andrew Pereira at 368-7273. Follow Andrew on Twitter at [Khon\\_Reporter](#)*

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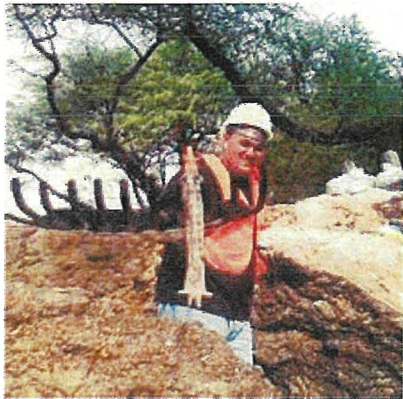
Around the World - Thursday



# Landfill waste discharged into ocean, includes medical waste

Published: 1/14 1:26 pm

Updated: 1/14 2:09 pm



 Slideshow

Landfill waste washing onto beaches includes syringes and other medical waste

Landfill waste from Waimanalo Gulch is once again in the ocean.

According to the city, storm water collected in the landfill cells, and will require the landfill's operator, Waste Management, to discharge stormwater into the storm drainage system over the next few days.

The drainage empties into the ocean near Ko Olina, prompting the closure of the lagoons at the resort area. Among the waste spotted on the beaches is medical waste like sterilized syringes and blood vials. The public is advised to avoid waters been Ko Olina and Kahe Power plant because of possible contamination.

In addition, the city says Waimanalo Gulch Landfill could be closed for the next 7 days, and people are advised not to put out bulky trash because it will not be picked up.

Tonight KHON2 will take you to the beach to see exactly what's washing ashore, and hear what health concerns the state has with the discharge, and how long the beaches could be closed.

That's tonight at 5, 6 and 10.

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Around the World - Friday



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Around the World - Thursday



## Wastewater discharge from Waimanalo Gulch landfill continues

POSTED: 09:19 a.m. HST, Jan 14, 2011

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By Star-Advertiser Staff

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Ko Olina beaches remain closed today as the city's landfill operator continues to release rainwater from the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill into the storm drainage system, which flows into the ocean.

The Honolulu Department of Environmental Services says the "unprecedented series of heavy rain events over the last week" prompted the decision to have Waste Management, the landfill operator, discharge the water over several days.

The storm drains discharge into the ocean between Ko Olina and the Kahe Power Plant.

The state Health Department said there was an uncontrolled release of stormwater Wednesday night and refuse, including medical waste, washed ashore at the Ko Olina Lagoons. The city has posted warning signs and water samples are being collected.

"After having numerous and ongoing discussions with various branches of the state Department of Health over the past several days, the decision was made to release the stormwater today, given the lack of feasible alternatives," the city said in a news release.

"The city will continue to meet with its operator to discuss the discharge, to ensure compliance with all applicable permits and laws, and will investigate the accumulation of stormwater as well as the possible presence of sterilized medical waste," the city said.

The flooded cell where the rainwater has collected last received waste on December 18 and was covered at the end of the day in conformance with Waste Management's permit, the city said.

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**EXHIBIT K99 at 5**

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Water conservation continues for Leeward residents

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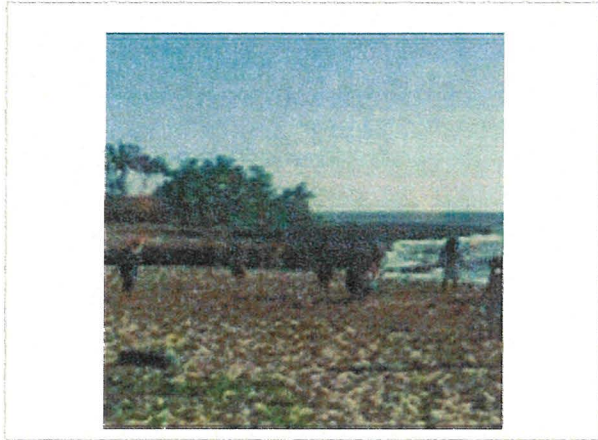
## Medical waste discharge leaves Nanakuli residents concerned about water safety

Reported by: [Brienne Randle](#)

Email: [brandle@khon2.com](mailto:brandle@khon2.com)

Published: 1/15 9:24 am

Updated: 1/15 9:49 am



"Not going in the water, just too brown for us," says Edie Van Gieson.

Too brown and too much for Van Gieson to worry about.

"Notice I have no kids on the beach, only up on the dry sand," she says.

She canceled The Leeward Kai Canoe Club practice Friday, keeping paddlers far from the water after what washed ashore less than four miles south of Nanakuli Beach Park.

"Horrified, really horrified," she says.

It's a sentiment other Leeward residents are repeating.

"It's just a really, gravely horrifying concern," says

Nanakuli resident Jojan Barrett.

Warning signs were posted at the Ko Olina Lagoons where the medical syringes and vials of blood were found. The state extended the postings to the Kahe Power Plant, but stopped there. "What's to say its not going to wash down here, that's like insane, it does. It has to go somewhere," says Barrett.

"You can tell, you can look at the waves," points out Van Gieson. "Really see it pushing everything this way."

"The last thing we want to do is have some type of injury," says Representative Karen Awana. Rep. Awana, who serves the Leeward area, questions why no warning signs were posted at Nanakuli Beach Park or further down the coastline.

"To say that we'll stop it at a certain point, I think a thorough review needs to be looked at," she says.

She alerted Honolulu Fire Department's Hazmat team, who searched the beach looking for medical waste.

"We need to take action, take steps to make sure the people are kept safe," says Rep. Awana.

No needles or vials were found, still others agree signs should have been posted.

"The waters are going to move, who knows what's being carried," says Congresswoman Colleen Hanabusa. "Clearly, clearly this is not acceptable."

Newly sworn Congresswoman Hanabusa is renewing her call for the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill to be shut down.

"So when we hear about what's going on now, the question becomes how can medical waste, which has stringent protocols on it, how can that be floating off into the ocean?"

Due to brown water conditions, the State Health Department is advising all beach goers to stay out of the water.

### Top Photo Galleries



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Around the World - Thursday





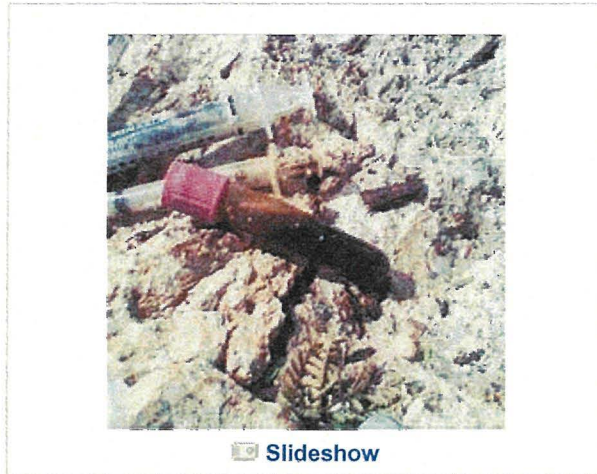
## More Medical Waste Keeps Washing Ashore Near Ko Olina Resort

Reported by: [Brienne Randle](#)

Email: [brandle@khon2.com](mailto:brandle@khon2.com)

Published: 1/15 6:15 pm

Updated: 1/15 8:59 pm



An area scoured by clean-up crews Friday, is littered once again.

"How you can quantify the problem when you don't know how much washed down," says Environmental Watchdog Carroll Cox.

The medical waste is still visible on the shoreline near Ko Olina Resort...but the clean-up crews are no where in site.

"No one is here picking it up, absolutely no one," says Cox.

Crews were out here yesterday filling bags full of syringes and vials of blood, but residents at Ko Olina want to know why no one is here today when the medical waste keeps washing ashore.

"So they came out and cleaned-up for one day and left, that too is a disgrace," says Rob Eisenhart.

Eisenhart and his wife Mary live at Ko Olina, and say as long as waste keeps washing ashore, someone should be here cleaning it up.

"Yeah, they still should be out here cleaning of course," he says.

"We swim right here, we used to, now I can't for how long?" questions Mary Eisenhart.

Joe Whelan, the General Manager of Waste Management Hawaii, the Waimanalo Gulch Landfill operator, tells KHON2: "Waste Management completed the cleanup of the storm water outfall area yesterday and the area south of the sedimentation basin today. This is located on landfill property just above the outfall point."

Cox says the clean-up is far from complete.

"They should have been here yesterday, the day before, and today and into the week coming," he says.

Department of Health Officials came to inspect the outfall area, and weren't surprised by what they saw.

"To be honest I'm not sure what would be surprising at this point but, I think we're gonna see it still for coming days," says Stu Yamada, DOH Environmental Services.

Yamada says the City needs to do more to keep the shore-line clean.

"We're going to be in contact with the the City and ask them to double their efforts," he says. "They're going to have to step up efforts to clean up the shoreline."

The Health Department reminds beach goers on the Leeward Coast to stay out of the water.

### Top Photo Galleries



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**Rain dislodges medical waste**

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 15, 2011

StarAdvertiser.com

Needles and vials foul beaches after storm water hits a landfill, leading a state official to say it "should never have happened"

By Gordon Y.K. Pang

Roger and Colleen Mehrer surveyed the muddy water at Ko Olina and watched as workers hauled away plastic bags of trash that had made its way from Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill above Farrington Highway.

The part-time Ko Olina residents did not see what was inside the bags, but they had read in yesterday's Star-Advertiser about the medical waste that had washed ashore at the West Oahu resort's lagoons and elsewhere along the Leeward Coast.

"How can medical supplies wash from the dump all the way down here?" Roger Mehrer said. "That's what surprised me."

Gary Gill, state deputy health director for environmental health, said, "Obviously, this situation should never have happened."

Rain accumulating at a reservoir above Oahu's only municipal landfill poured into a "cell" of waste, causing it to overflow and send a torrent of debris-laden storm water down a concrete spillway and into waters just off the Ko Olina Resort on Wednesday, said officials with the city and Waste Management Inc., the company that operates the landfill.

Medical waste, including syringes and vials that appeared to contain blood, were among the debris that washed ashore along beaches at Ko Olina's four lagoons and other western shores, including the area around Kalaeloa Harbor.

Gill said his agency was still compiling data on the waste that washed ashore and testing water quality samples from different points along the coast to determine whether there was contamination. Meanwhile, Ko Olina's lagoons as well as beaches elsewhere along the Leeward Coast remained closed to the public until further notice.

"The landfill is supposed to be designed to divert any floodwaters from the mauka areas, push those waters along the side of the landfill," Gill said. "The waters should not have crossed on top of the landfill; they should not have eroded a cell full of waste that was placed in that landfill; and certainly no waste, medical or otherwise, is supposed to leave this landfill."

Joe Whelan, Waste Management's general manager for the landfill, said the company was weeks away from completing a bypass route that would have diverted the storm water from the upper reservoir straight into the drainage way, avoiding the landfill cells.

The additional measures were required under Waste Management's latest permit allowed by the state Land Use Commission. Granted in September 2009 after much debate and controversy, the permit allows the landfill to expand and continue operating, but only through 2012.

Had the improvements been completed, the water still would have ended up in the filtration basin at the base of the landfill, but it would not have gone through the landfill cells, picking up rubbish along the way, Whelan said.

**HOW IT HAPPENED**

Heavy rain initiated a chain of events that led to a spill of medical waste-laden water into the ocean:

- (1) Water from a large reservoir above the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill overflowed, pouring into a cell, or a section filled with waste.
- (2) The cell overflowed, sending debris-laden storm water into a drainage way along the landfill's Waianae-side border.
- (3) The drain emptied into a filtration basin at the bottom of the landfill, just mauka of Farrington Highway.
- (4) The basin overflowed, sending water and debris pouring into three storm water drainage pipes that pass under the highway and onto Ko Olina Resort property.
- (5) Water and debris entered the ocean from the three storm drains near the northern border of Ko Olina.

Numbers refer to points on associated map, shown above with photos.

Five inches of rain fell on Dec. 19, and then again about a week later, so water had already begun to accumulate along the route and in the basin below, Whelan said. The 11-inch rainfall that occurred late Wednesday and early Thursday caused the water to go over the top, he said.

**EXHIBIT K99 at 11**

Tim Steinberger, city director of environmental services, said the storm was a "catastrophic weather event" and that the overflow was caused by an extraordinary set of circumstances. "We haven't had a rain like this, ever."

Asked whether it was time for the city to reassess its design standards, Steinberger said, "That's a discussion I think perhaps the engineers should have."

Nonetheless, Steinberger said, "As far as what ended up at the beach, obviously, we're very concerned. We're very concerned about any issue that affects the public health."

The landfill is allowed to accept medical waste, but it is supposed to be sanitized, Gill said.

It is too early to say whether Waste Management or the city will be fined by either the Health Department or the federal Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

Crews hired by Waste Management cleaned the debris from the mouth of the drain and nearby beaches through much of the day.

Below Farrington Highway, officials and residents at Ko Olina Resort were unhappy with the situation.

Ko Olina Community Association General Manager Ken Williams said various types of trash accompanied the storm water coming out of the drain Thursday. "It was covered," Williams said.

The waste washed ashore on all of Ko Olina's beaches, he said. "There was a mixture of waste ... a mixture of trash that would come out of the landfill."

Ko Olina Resort has long opposed the landfill's expansion, and Williams reiterated the call for its shutdown yesterday.

"This thing was supposed to close in 1998, and it's had extension after extension," he said. "This is probably the worst occurrence that we could imagine, with the most direct impact we could have at our resort."

The beaches at Ko Olina and elsewhere along the Leeward Coast are expected to remain closed to the public until water monitoring results show the water is safe.

Mehrer, the part-time Ko Olina resident, said he is concerned about what the waste is doing to the ocean environment in the area, which is usually teeming with fish and turtles. "What is it doing to the environment and ecosystem that we can't see? And how long will it take to clean up?"

Because of the landfill's problems, the facility will remain shut down until at least next Saturday, Steinberger said.

Most of the city's municipal solid waste now goes to HPOWER, the city's waste-to-energy facility in nearby Kalaeloa, where it is burned to make fuel. The majority of what goes into the landfill, therefore, is composed of bulky items that cannot be burned.

The city is limiting its bulky item pickup service to metal items, such as washing machines.

**CORRECTION:** Drainage pipes carried storm water from the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill under Farrington Highway and the Ko Olina Resort, emptying at an ocean outfall. A graphic in a previous version of this story stated that the storm water was carried under the highway and onto Ko Olina property.

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**More medical waste at ocean's edge**

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 16, 2011

StarAdvertiser.com

Syringes, some filled with what appears to be blood, continue to litter Ko Olina's shores

By Gordon Y.K. Pang



Medical waste continued to turn up at the mouth of a storm drain at the edge of Ko Olina Resort yesterday, a day after Waste Management Hawaii finished its cleanup of debris that washed down from the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill last week.

Carroll Cox, a citizen environmental watchdog, said he collected about 35 syringes yesterday from that area, some with needles and some with vials of red liquid that appeared to be blood. He said he also collected about seven vials filled with red and yellow liquid that appeared to be blood or urine.

What he gathered and photographed accounted for about half of what he saw coming from the storm drain, as well as washing back in from the ocean, he said.

"They were just popping up like minnow," Cox said, referring to the waste that was coming out of the outfall.

Tim Steinberger, city environmental services director, said that when he heard reports about noon yesterday that debris was continuing to wash ashore, he told Waste Management officials to send workers to the shoreline.

Steinberger said he was told workers walked the shoreline yesterday from White Plains Beach in Kalaeloa to the outfall at Ko Olina. "The message that I got back was they didn't see anything significant, but I have no idea what 'significant' means," he said.

Steinberger said the reports of debris "bothered the heck out of me" and that his office will be at the shoreline today to ensure Waste Management is keeping the area clean.

The deluge of rain late Wednesday caused an unknown volume of water to flood a section of the landfill, sending debris-laden storm water down to a filtration basin. In turn, water and debris from the basin spilled into three storm water drainage pipes that pass under Farrington Highway and through Ko Olina property into the ocean near the resort's northern border.

A Waste Management official said in a statement yesterday that the company completed its pickup along the shoreline on Friday and that its workers yesterday focused on cleaning an area next to the filtration basin.

Steinberger said the company is focused on cleaning the basin and surrounding area in anticipation of new rains expected today. But that doesn't mean they should not also be monitoring the beach, he said.

"I told them to get people down there," he said.

Steinberger said the storm water now being released from the basin at the edge of the landfill is being closely monitored by state Health Department officials and that he suspects most if not all of the debris is coming in from the ocean.

On Friday, the state Health Department shut down the lagoons at Ko Olina as well as nearby beaches.

City spokeswoman Louise Kim McCoy said that beginning Thursday, city employees posted more than 65 signs warning beachgoers not to go into the water until the Health Department advises otherwise.

The landfill is allowed to accept sanitized medical waste, state and city officials said.

Joe Whelan, general manager of the landfill, said Friday that less than 1 percent of the waste accepted consists of medical waste and that only a few companies send such waste there.

Whelan said the company was only weeks away from completing a bypass drainage way that would have diverted storm water from a large reservoir above the landfill away from the waste.

The landfill is closed until further notice.

City officials said that until the landfill reopens, curbside bulky item pickup will be limited to metal appliances such as washers and dryers. Other items such as furniture, mattresses and toilets won't be picked up and should not be placed curbside.

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**EXHIBIT K99 at 13**

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## Ko Olina beaches still closed after waste release

POSTED: 05:17 a.m. HST, Jan 19, 2011

StarAdvertiser.com

By AUDREY McAVOY, Associated Press



Ko Olina Resort's beaches were still closed Tuesday after flooding at the city's only landfill led to medical waste and other debris pouring into the ocean last week.

The beaches front Oahu's biggest resort area outside Waikiki. The 387-room JW Marriot Ihilani Resort & Spa, a massive Disney hotel under construction that's due to open in August, and a time-share condominium complex all overlook a series of man-made beaches and lagoons.

The state ordered the shorelines closed after heavy rains led the nearby Waimanalo Gulch Landfill to release contaminated storm water and municipal solid waste into the Pacific Ocean next to the resort area.

The state Department of Health was still testing the water on Tuesday. The first lab results from water sampling taken Thursday indicated "very high" bacteria levels consistent with polluted runoff from a storm.

The city has posted warning signs saying "Warning: Contaminated Water — No Swimming, No Boating, No Fishing" at a Nanakuli surf spot known as Tracks and down the coast to the harbor and marina entrance past Ko Olina.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sent three people to Oahu — an on-scene coordinator and two engineers — to monitor the response and offer advice.

They were focused on making sure the landfill has a functioning storm water retention area and would be able to prevent a similar situation if there's more heavy rain, EPA spokesman Dean Higuchi said.

Asked if the agency would be investigating the city, which owns the landfill, for the debris spill, Higuchi said he couldn't say either way.

"It's way to soon to start looking at enforcement. At this point, the focus is on cleanup. The focus is also to ensure the integrity of the landfill's stormwater system," Higuchi said.

**EXHIBIT K99 at 15**

"If we focused on enforcement now and forgot about the rest, it would happen again."

The landfill, which is operated by contractor Waste Management, Inc., is due to close in 2012. The city had wanted to keep it open for another 15 years, but the state Land Use Commission rejected that plan.

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**Dirty beaches mar Ko Olina**

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 21, 2011

StarAdvertiser.com

Some tourism officials worry that the news of contamination will have a lingering effect

By Allison Schaefer

On their last day on Oahu, the Winters family of Wisconsin drove to Ko Olina for the third time hoping to swim in the resort's normally crystal-clear lagoons.

The family left disappointed when they were told that all four lagoons were still closed at the resort beach in front of the upscale JW Marriott Ihilani, Ko Olina Beach Club and the future Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa. The resort beach and others along the leeward coast were closed last Thursday by the city after its only landfill flooded, pouring medical waste and other debris into the ocean.

"We were able to see the beach before it happened. It was so incredibly beautiful, but we didn't have a chance to swim," said Joette Winters.

By the time the family returned, "everything had changed," she said.

The city has posted signs saying "Warning: Contaminated Water -- No Swimming, No Boating, No Fishing," at several beaches along Oahu's leeward coast.

The once-pristine beach at Ko Olina was littered with used needles, plastic casings and other medical waste. Water at the resort's marina was as brown as the "Pirates of the Caribbean" ship docked there by Disney, and lagoon waters were brown to about a half-mile out from the coast.

While some of the leeward beaches, including Nimitz and White Plains, have reopened, Ko Olina remained closed yesterday. Public beach access was closed, too. Greeters at the guard shack blocked would-be lagoon visitors from entering the resort. Those who managed to get by, as well as residents, were further dissuaded from getting too near contaminated waters by barriers at the lagoons.

Guests at the JW Marriott Ihilani and Marriott's Ko Olina Beach Club were issued letters by hotel management explaining that the beaches were still unsafe to swim, said Sweetie Nelson, a spokeswoman for Ko Olina Beach Resort. Orange cones, ropes and signs also kept guests from getting too near the ocean, Nelson said.

"We are on pins and needles waiting to hear when the beach can reopen," she said. "But obviously we have to get the go-ahead from the city that it's safe first. We are hoping to hear good news in the next day or two."

Ko Olina workers were joined yesterday by city Waste Management personnel who will continue scouring leeward beaches until they are clear of landfill debris. Ko Olina residents Sue and Sam Rakes were trying to do their part, too. The couple, who bought a Ko Olina Fairways townhouse in 2009, were filling plastic bags with some of the waste that dotted their neighborhood.

"It's getting better," Sue Rakes said. "Right after the storm, we filled bags with so much plastic that we were about to give up."

There is noticeably less waste on the beach at Ko Olina; however, the couple said that it will be a while before they swim in the resort's lagoons.

"After what I saw, 10 years from now, I'll still be hesitant to go in the water," said Sam Rakes.

State health spokeswoman Janice Okubo said yesterday that the state and city were in discussions about when Ko Olina's beach ban could be removed.

The city posted warning signs after tests showed a high level of bacteria in the water; however, Okubo said that subsequent tests taken after storm runoff and water discharge from the landfill stopped have showed lower levels of bacteria.

"It showed the water is returning to normal, but we still need to discuss it with the city," she said.

The resort, which is expecting full occupancy for the upcoming NFL Pro Bowl on Jan. 30, needs to get its beaches reopened soon, Nelson said.

"We're worried," Nelson said. "If our hotels are impacted economically, we are impacted."

The Hawaii Tourism Authority and the Hawaii Visitors and Convention Bureau have not received any visitor complaints. Still, news of the contamination has spread far and wide and some in the tourism industry have expressed concern that the flooding could have a lingering impact.

Sherri Bracy, a tourist from Michigan, who was sunbathing yesterday outside of Ko Olina's Beach Club, said that she can understand why the ban might give some a reason to complain. However, Bracy said that so far her family's four-day vacation at the resort has been OK.

"We've spent time at the pool and in the sunshine," Bracy said. "It's about 5 degrees in Michigan so we're just happy to be here."

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Star-Advertiser reporter Gary Kubota contributed to this report.

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