

HawaiiNewsNow.com (KGMB, KHNL)

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

Posted: Jan 14, 2011 3:12 PM Friday, January 14, 2011 8:12 PM EST Updated: Jan 14, 2011 9:07 PM Saturday, January 15, 2011 2:07 AM EST

The EPA is gathering information about the spill through the state Department of Health. "When there's a violation of permits or water quality, **there's a potential enforcement action**," Gill added. That "enforcement action" could come in the form of fines against the city or Waste Management.

"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**

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Rain dislodges medical waste

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](#)

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

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.

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."

HONOLULU CIVIL BEAT

Stormwater Released Into Ocean to Avoid Larger Landfill Catastrophe

By [Michael Levine](#) 01/28/2011

As bad as the landfill spill was, the decision to release **contaminated stormwater** into the ocean was necessary to prevent something even worse — a catastrophic structural failure, a top state Health Department official told Civil Beat.

In his first lengthy interview since the spill two weeks ago, Deputy Health Direct Gary Gill said Thursday that even knowing what he knows today, he wouldn't have done anything differently.

This is how Gill described the scene at Waimanalo Gulch Landfill **on the night of Jan. 12:**

A cascade of rainwater dislodged garbage from a giant pile into a rapidly rising pool of water. Plastic, paper, clamshells from plate lunches and even medical waste floated across the top of the "lake" and poured into a storm drain near the lip of the basin — like the hole near the top of a bathroom sink — on their way to the ocean below.

The Hawaii Department of Health and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency decided the afternoon of Jan. 13 that bringing down the level of **the lake** atop the landfill was paramount, even if that meant **pumping untreated stormwater** into the ocean. **For three days, until pumping stopped at 10 a.m. on Jan. 16, water discharged without undergoing normal treatment procedures.**

There's no provision in the city's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit that allows pumping untreated stormwater to the ocean, Gill said. But because that **activity "was done with the approval of the Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency to avoid the potential of a greater disaster ... it's not likely that we would enforce against a permit violation for something we authorized."**

(NOTE: IF THERE WAS CONCERN FOR PUBLIC SAFETY, WHY WERE NO WARNINGS GIVEN TO THE PUBLIC? THEY KNEW THERE WAS MEDICAL WASTE INVOLVED, SHOULD HAVE ISSUED AN ORDER TO KEEP PEOPLE OUT OF THE WATER.)

But that leachate is normally treated, not just dumped into the ocean. Asked if it was safe to release the stormwater into the environment, **Gill said safe is a "term of art that the Department of Health is always confronting."**

"You're dealing with a level of risk," he said. "It's a term of relative meaning, and difficult to answer."

Gill said the basin was already partly filled from a pair of rain events in December. After those storms, Waste Management pumped the standing water into trucks that took the stormwater to a treatment plant. That is the standard, but slow, method of removing excess water from the site.

"The water had been brought down and then it filled up again to just a few feet below the berm. ... The risk there is a catastrophic collapse," Gill said. **"It was only after the third storm ... that the lake itself became a safety hazard and had to be dealt with immediately."**

If the water had been released before the third storm, it may have prevented the release of the medical waste and garbage that littered the beaches and ocean, Gill acknowledged. But, he said, "the Department of Health was not going to authorize the discharge of that contaminated stormwater into the storm drain system. The water was being drawn down at an adequate pace until the third storm hit," he said.]

"In hindsight, I don't think we would have done anything differently."

KHON-2

Needles And Blood Filled Vials



Reported by: [Andrew Pereira](#)

Email: apereira@khon2.com

Last Update: 1/14 8:18 pm

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.

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."

"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."

HawaiiNewsNow.com (KGMB, KHNL)

EPA allows Waimanalo Gulch landfill to reopen

Posted: Jan 28, 2011 1:35 PM Friday, January 28, 2011 6:35 PM EST Updated: Jan 28, 2011 8:28 PM

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved reopening of the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill Friday, with conditions.

EPA's approval followed the agency's review and acceptance of the independent engineering report certifying that necessary repairs to the landfill were completed.

KITV

Landfill Flooding Contaminates Ocean, Beaches

Medical Waste Washes Ashore At Ko Olina Lagoons

[Keoki Kerr](#) KITV4 News

POSTED: 9:45 pm HST January 13, 2011

UPDATED: 8:17 am HST January 14, 2011

Gill said storm water has collected into a pond at the top of the landfill, and to prevent further damage to the landfill, that water still needs to be pumped out.

"There's no other viable way to remove it except by pumping it down into the storm system," Gill said.

(NOTE: water in “pond” was leachate)

KHON-2

Landfill closure reaching tipping point



Reported by: [Andrew Pereira](#)

Email: apereira@khon2.com

Last Update: 1/25 10:30 am

When asked about possibly mobilizing the **National Guard** to help comb the coastline for medical waste, **Abercrombie's spokeswoman** Donalyn Dela Cruz said it was never under consideration.

“At no time at the landfill did (Deputy Health Director Gary Gill) think it was necessary,” said Dela Cruz. **“This is the first time this has come up.”**

STAR ADVERTISER

More medical waste at ocean's edge

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

[By Gordon Y.K. Pang](#)

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

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.

STAR ADVERTISER

Landfill operator collecting debris

Spilled medical waste is sterilized, a firm says

[By Rob Shikina](#)

POSTED: 01:30 a.m. HST, Jan 17, 2011

Tim Steinberger, director of the city Department of Environmental Services, said Waste Management, the operator of Waimanalo Gulch Landfill, had installed a barrier to remove debris in storm runoff water before it reaches a drainage basin.

On Thursday the basin had medical waste floating on top when it overflowed, sending contaminated runoff into the ocean.

In a statement the Health Department said all release of muddy water from the landfill had been stopped by 10 a.m. yesterday and that the level of water in the basin had been lowered by pumping.

KITV

Honolulu Council Members Look For Answers On Landfill

[Waimanalo Gulch Landfill Closed Since Trash Released Into Leeward Beaches](#)

[Jodi Leong](#) KITV4 News Reporter

POSTED: 10:18 pm HST January 24, 2011

UPDATED: 11:12 pm HST January 24, 2011

The current system, a 36- inch pipe that discharges water from the cell, failed. "Due to the nature of the storm and the intensity of it, it very quickly failed," said Whelan.

But Steinberger warned that even if the landfill reopens on Thursday, there will be a backlog of trash and period of catching up. Honolulu **Mayor Peter Carlisle** said despite the city's budget problems, it will have no choice but to **pay over-time for its bulky item pick-up workers** to clear up the trash piling up in our communities.

