



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

News Release

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR

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ORGANIC CHEMICAL FOUND ON WALLS OF KAUAI WATER TANK

Findings do not represent a health threat

HONOLULU – Recent samples taken from the inner wall of a Princeville water tank, part of a private water system on Kauai, have been confirmed to contain the organic chemical polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The samples were tested as part of an ongoing investigation to determine a source for contamination previously announced in December of last year. Intense and regular testing has confirmed that the community's drinking water remains safe. However, the source of the contamination remains unclear. Efforts to remove the contamination are advancing under the Department of Health's supervision.

PCBs do not dissolve well in water. Extensive monitoring performed on the drinking water distribution system has determined that the chemical is not in Princeville's drinking water. Water served to the public continues to be safe.

"The Department continues to sample Princeville drinking water. We have confirmed that PCBs are not reaching people's homes," said Gary Gill, Deputy Director for Environmental Health. "Our Safe Drinking Water Branch is working closely with Princeville Utility Company to assure that their work to fix this problem will continue to protect the public."

On December 14, 2012, the Department of Health (DOH) announced that contaminants had been found in a water reservoir in Princeville, Kauai. DOH and the Princeville Utilities Company Inc. (PUCI), owner and operator of the private Princeville water system, have taken immediate action to maintain the quality of the water to protect the health of residents who use it. The water system serves a population of about 2,200 people on Kauai's north shore.

(more)

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On March 14, 2013, DOH learned that scrapings from the inner wall of the Princeville water tank were confirmed to contain PCBs. Aroclor 1254, one component of PCBs, was found at 2600 parts per million (ppm). Another component, Aroclor 1260, was also found at 2100 ppm. The caulking on the outside of the tank was also tested and was found to contain PCBs.

Concrete caulking compounds containing PCBs were sometimes used in expansion joints in concrete structures erected prior to 1980. The Princeville water tank was built in 1971. Commercial production of PCBs ended in 1977 because of health effects associated with exposure. In 1979, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency banned the use of PCBs, however, PCBs may still be present in many pre-1979 products.

PUCI, with DOH approval, has decided to take the tank out of service to clean it. PUCI will remove an oily residue from the inner tank wall to help ensure that the chemicals do not leach into drinking water. PUCI will install three new temporary 20,000 gallon water tanks to bypass the 1.5 million gallon tank. During the bypass operation, residents will be urged to conserve water. For more information on PUCI's mitigation measures, contact Mike Loo of PUCI at (808) 826-6100.

The DOH has directed PUCI to continue weekly water testing to determine if PCBs are present in the distribution system and in sample water skimmed from the tank water surface. These samples are sent to CalScience Laboratory in California for testing; the CalScience Laboratory is certified by the DOH to run PCB analyses. The DOH is also conducting concurrent monitoring twice per month to ensure that PCBs have not entered the drinking water distribution system.

The federal and state Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) for PCBs in drinking water is 0.5 parts per billion at the compliance sampling point, which is immediately after the 1.5 million gallon water tank. This standard is set to avoid health risks based on a lifetime of consuming water containing that level of contaminant. PCBs are a group of organic chemicals formerly used in the United States in hydraulic fluids, plasticizers, adhesives, fire retardants, and de-dusting agents. To date, the Princeville water system is in compliance with federal and state PCB standards for drinking water.

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