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THE FACTS about the disposal of contaminated soils from the EPA Cleanup Action in Kilauea at the Kekaha Landfill

Some residents of Kauai have expressed concerns about the ongoing disposal of contaminated soils at the Kekaha Landfill. This fact sheet will address some of the questions that the community has raised.

What is the clean up in Kilauea?

At the request of the Department of Health, the US Environmental Protection Agency agreed to clean up contaminated soil from an old sugar mill pesticide mixing area discovered under two homes in a residential neighborhood in Kilauea. The concentrations of arsenic and dioxin present in surface soils make the cleanup necessary to protect the affected families because long-term exposure to these soils is not safe for children and others who may come in direct contact with the contaminated soils.

Why are soils being disposed of at the Kekaha landfill?

Contaminated soils do not belong in people's yards. The Kekaha municipal landfill is designed and permitted to safely receive and store a wide variety of wastes, including contaminated soils. Currently, there is no other landfill elsewhere on the island that could safely store this soil.

Why is the soil clean up happening now?

This federal emergency action addresses a serious public safety issue affecting residents on Kauai. The action has been carefully designed to ensure that no danger exists to anyone on Kauai as a result of the excavation, transport and disposal of the pesticide-contaminated soils. The clean up meets all state, county and federal regulatory requirements and keeps everyone on the island safe. It is important to keep the project on time and on budget.

Were the rules changed to allow disposal of soil at the Kekaha landfill?

No. The terms of the Kekaha landfill permit have not changed. The landfill has been approved to take this kind of soil since the landfill was permitted in 1994.

THE FACTS about the Disposal of Pesticide-contaminated Soils from the Town of Kilauea at the Kekaha Landfill

Was EPA approval needed before the soils could be disposed of at Kekaha?

Yes. US EPA has a rule that requires that landfills be inspected and certified separately by EPA prior being used to dispose of waste from any federal emergency response actions. The purpose of this rule is to ensure that the landfill is in full compliance with its state permits. An EPA specialist inspected the facility, certified that it met all its permit conditions and approved its use.

The soil from Kilauea is considered “Special Waste.” What is “Special Waste?”

Under the DOH permit, certain kinds of waste require special handling procedures at the landfill. Special wastes include petroleum and other chemically contaminated soils, medical waste, dead animals and asbestos. Once the soils from Kilauea arrive at the landfill, they are immediately placed in a trench and covered, with a water truck standing by ready to add moisture if necessary to prevent dust generation. The landfill is held to strict requirements to ensure all wastes are managed safely to protect the community and the environment.

Will transporting these soils through our neighborhoods cause harm to our families?

No. The soils are being transported in trucks that are covered. Soils are wetted down before covering to keep dust levels down. Small amounts of dust that may be generated during excavation, transportation and disposal operations will not cause a health risk. EPA is watching for any dust emissions and will add more dust control measures if necessary.

Are there other contaminated soils that may be disposed of at the Kekaha landfill?

Yes. There are a number of sites on Kauai that have elevated levels of pesticides in the soil. In Kekaha, plans are being made to address contaminated soils discovered near a native Hawaiian charter school. One option is to dispose of these soils at the Kekaha landfill, and replace them with clean soils so that children walking to and from school won't be in contact with pesticide contaminated soils.

Why not ship all this contaminated soil off island?

Materials that can be safely disposed of in permitted landfill on island are not required to be shipped off island. Some highly contaminated materials that meet the state definition of “hazardous waste” must be shipped to special hazardous waste landfills located on the mainland. The cost for off island disposal is prohibitively high. The soils being excavated from the two residential yards in Kilauea are not hazardous waste.

Is this the first time contaminated soils and other potentially toxic materials have been placed in Kekaha landfill?

No. Disposal of contaminated materials and soils has been going on at Kekaha and other permitted municipal landfills in Hawaii for years. Common examples include contaminated soils from spills of gasoline, chemicals and pesticides, asbestos and construction debris with lead paint or canec, soils from under old home foundations that may have elevated levels of historic pesticides, and waste chemicals that are not classified as “hazardous waste”.

For more information, please contact the agency representatives listed on the next page.

THE FACTS about the Disposal of Pesticide-contaminated Soils from the Town of Kilauea at the Kekaha Landfill

US Environmental Protection Agency

Questions about the clean up action underway in Kilauea

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Hawaii Department of Health

Questions about DOH's role in the Kilauea cleanup, as well as the upcoming cleanup in Kekaha

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County of Kauai

Questions about the Kekaha Landfill operations and management

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