



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 3, 2021

WHITE HOUSE RESPONDS TO CNHA LETTER IMPLORING ACTION ON RED HILL FUEL STORAGE TANKS

KAPOLEI, Hawai‘i – The White House is promising a formal response to the dire situation involving the Red Hill fuel storage tanks. That acknowledgment comes just hours after [Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement \(CNHA\)](#) CEO Kūhiō Lewis sent an letter urging President Biden to take immediate action on the tanks threatening the aquifer that supplies water to nearly half of O‘ahu’s residents.

“Many fear that we are on the doorstep of disaster, or worse, that we have already crossed the threshold,” said Lewis. “The reports over the last few days of area residents – including military service members and their families – becoming seriously ill from drinking water contaminated with petroleum is horrifying.”

When President Biden recently met with CNHA in Washington, D.C., he committed to addressing issues impacting the Native Hawaiian community. Lewis said the U.S. Navy’s inaction and unresponsiveness to ongoing community concerns about the Red Hill tanks left him no other recourse but to reach out to the President for kōkua. CNHA’s letter cites the cultural importance of water to Native Hawaiians, noting that the integrity and well-being of our ‘ohana and community are intrinsically connected to the health of our islands, their fragile ecosystems, and finite natural resources.

[During a hearing of the House Armed Services Committee](#), Hawai‘i Rep. Kaiali‘i Kahele called the Red Hill issue “a crisis of astronomical proportions.”

“People are getting sick,” he said. “Animals are getting sick, and our military families need answers and the island of O‘ahu needs answers.”

Lewis will join other community leaders and activists at a press conference and rally at the Prince Kūhiō Federal Building beginning at 2:30 p.m. this afternoon to demand a meeting with the visiting Secretary of the Navy. He is urging the Native Hawaiian community to take part in the rally and to join the growing chorus of voices demanding the shutdown of the Red Hill fuel storage tanks.

The Red Hill crisis will be the focus of a panel discussion at the 20th Annual Native Hawaiian Convention hosted by CNHA next week. The panel will include: Congressman Kaiali‘i Kahele; professor and former state water commissioner Kamanamaikalani Beamer; Honolulu Board of Water Supply Chief Engineer Ernie Lau; and Sierra Club of Hawai‘i Director Wayne Chung Tanaka. To take part in the panel discussion, or for more information, [click here](#).

Kūhiō Lewis is available for interviews.

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December 2, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

December 2, 2021

Re: Catastrophe in Hawai'i Involving the U.S. Navy Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility

Aloha e Mr. President,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Council For Native Hawaiian Advancement (CNHA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to enhance the cultural, economic, political, and community development of Native Hawaiians, with an urgent request for your intervention into the affairs surrounding the tragic release of petroleum into Hawai'i's drinking water supply from the U.S. Navy Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility.

In early August of this year, I had the honor and privilege to meet with you and Madame Vice President as a leader from the Native Hawaiian community. In that meeting, you agreed to work with Native Hawaiian leaders on issues affecting our community so we no longer felt invisible in Washington, D.C. In light of your commitment, I felt compelled to bring to you this critical issue which affects our Native Hawaiian community as well as the broader public.

Issues and controversy surrounding the 187-million-gallon capacity Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility have been ongoing since the start of its construction in 1940. The fuel storage tanks sit just 100 feet above a sole source aquifer that supplies potable water for 400,000 O'ahu residents – nearly half of the island's population.

Over the years, the aging and now antiquated fuel tanks have leaked substantial amounts of fuel, which has already reached Hawai'i's groundwater table. The public has expressed growing concern that future leaks from the compromised nature of the facility's infrastructure, compounded by human error and/or natural disasters, would lead to drinking water contamination – a catastrophe that is unfolding as I write this letter, with reports of petroleum being detected in the tap water of residential areas, and most recently, at an elementary school.

The reports over the last few days of area residents – as well as military service members and their families – becoming seriously ill from drinking water contaminated with petroleum is horrifying. Many fear that we are on the doorstep of disaster, or worse, that we have already crossed the threshold.



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Here in Hawai'i, the integrity and well-being of our families are often inherently connected to the health of our islands, their fragile ecosystems, and finite natural resources – this is especially so for Hawai'i's indigenous people, Native Hawaiians. One of our most important natural resources is fresh water. This vital resource is critical to our livelihood as isolated islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

As Native Hawaiians, we cherish these islands and the very limited resources that we have with lessons of conservation, sustainability, and self-sufficiency ingrained into our culture, values, and beliefs; this has been our way of survival in these Hawaiian Islands since time immemorial.

The Native Hawaiian community, as well as many others, have struggled for many years to hold the U.S. Navy accountable to its trust responsibilities to safeguard the environment and operate with best stewardship practices. After so many years of warning, issues that we have long feared are now upon us, with no sign of relenting. It is only a matter of time before the damage done is irreversible and more gravely catastrophic.

In closing, Mr. President, we humbly ask your assistance in addressing this pressing issue and doing everything in your power to relocate the Navy's fuel away from our groundwater aquifer and drinking water supply before more harm befalls our community. Should you or your staff have questions about this matter, please contact me on my cell at (808) 493-9284 or via email at kuhio@hawaiiancouncil.org.

Mahalo nui for your attention to this urgent matter.

Me ka ha'aha'a (humbly),

J. Kūhiō Lewis, Chief Executive Officer
Council For Native Hawaiian Advancement