

Article URL: <http://starbulletin.com/2007/12/11/news/story02.html>  
© 1996-2008 The Honolulu Star-Bulletin | [www.starbulletin.com](http://www.starbulletin.com)

# Star-Bulletin

mobile edition

Vol. 12, Issue 345 - Tuesday, December 11, 2007



STAR-BULLETIN  
Upgrading the Sand Island Wastewater  
Treatment Plant could cost the city at least \$600  
million.

## EPA denies Sand Island exemption

**The decision could force upgrades of the city's waste-water treatment plants**

**STORY SUMMARY »**

The city is fighting a decision by the Environmental Protection Agency calling for an upgrade of the Sand Island Wastewater Treatment Plant, just as it did when the federal agency made a similar ruling against the Honouliuli Wastewater Treatment Plant earlier this year.

The cost of upgrading both facilities would be more than \$1.2 billion, according to Mayor Mufi Hannemann.

**On the Net**  
» [www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov)

He maintains there is no scientific evidence that the Honouliuli and Sand Island facilities need to provide any more treatment than they already provide.

The EPA, however, contends that both plants do not meet water quality standards to protect marine life or human consumption of fish.

## What's next?

- » A public hearing on the EPA decision on the Sand Island Wastewater Treatment Plant waiver is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 5 at Washington Intermediate School.
- » The public is invited to comment on the decision through Feb. 29.
- » The EPA's final decision on a similar waiver for the Honouliuli treatment plant is expected next year.

[FULL STORY >](#)

**By Gregg K. Kakesako**  
[gkakesako@starbulletin.com](mailto:gkakesako@starbulletin.com)

The latest action by the Environmental Protection Agency could force the city to either upgrade its sewage treatment plants to the tune of \$1.2 billion or to fight the federal government in court.

The EPA refused yesterday to renew the city's request for a variance to exempt the Sand Island Wastewater Treatment Plant, the state's largest facility, from full secondary-treatment requirements.

Eric Takamura, director of the city's Department of Environmental Services, said it will oppose the EPA's decision just as it did after the federal agency made a similar decision in March involving the Honouliuli Wastewater Treatment Plant, the second largest on Oahu.

"The city believes the (Sand Island) plant's operations are consistent with Clean Water Act objectives of protecting public health and the environment," he said.

Jeff Mikulina, director of Sierra Club Hawaii, said the EPA's decision was not a surprise. "It's time to get this facility into the 21st century."

The next step will be a period of public comment through Feb. 29 and a hearing on the EPA's decision at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 5 at Washington Intermediate School.

## Types of water treatments

The city uses primary treatment at the Sand Island Wastewater Treatment Plant, but the Environmental Protection Agency says that needs to be upgraded to secondary treatment. Here is the difference between the two:

**Primary treatment:** Screens out large floating objects such as rags and sticks, removes grit (cinders, sand and small stones) and uses holding tanks to settle out solid materials suspended in the water.

**Secondary treatment:** Primary-treated waste water flows into another facility where a large portion of the organic matter in the waste water is removed by allowing bacteria to consume most of the matter.

*Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency*

Still pending is a final EPA decision on a similar waiver for the Honouliuli treatment plant that an EPA spokesman said is not expected until next year. A public hearing on a waiver for Honouliuli was held May 29, and the public comment was extended for 90 days into August.

"Just as we did with the Honouliuli tentative denial, we will oppose the Sand Island tentative denial with an appropriate scientific and technical response," Takamura added. "We will take the necessary and appropriate amounts of time to formally respond to the EPA, given the gravity of this decision for the customers of this county."

The discharged water from both plants currently does not meet water quality standards. They are operating under a variance from secondary treatment. If the EPA's proposal becomes final, the plants will be required to upgrade to full secondary treatment. The Sand Island facility treats waste in urban Honolulu, while Honouliuli is responsible for the Central Oahu to Ewa areas.

Primary treatment generally involves screening out large floating objects such as rags and sticks; removing grit, such as cinders, sand and small stones; and allowing waste water to settle, followed by the removal of collected solids. With secondary treatment, primary-treated waste water flows into another facility where a large portion of the organic matter in the waste water is removed by making use of the bacteria in the sewage.

Mayor Mufi Hannemann has said upgrading Honouliuli would cost at least \$400 million. Paying for similar fixes to Sand Island would boost the costs to more than \$1 billion.

Hannemann has said EPA's call for upgrading Honouliuli was "unreasonable, untimely, unfair and unnecessary," adding he is considering legal challenges.

In March, Hannemann said there was "no scientific evidence that the Honouliuli plant or Sand Island needs to provide any more treatment than it is already providing."

He cited a 1996 study and subsequent monitoring that have shown no adverse impact on the environment or public.

Still pending is a decision by U.S. Judge David Ezra on the amount the city must pay because of a lawsuit filed in 2004 by the Sierra Club, Hawaii's Thousand Friends and Our Children's Earth Foundation.

Last month, Ezra said the city had violated the permit for the Sand Island plant by releasing levels higher than the authorized limit of a bacteria called enterococcus 1,603 times from July 31, 2002, to March 31, 2007.

The city also violated the permit by not building a Sand Island disinfection facility by the deadline of July 21, 2002. Instead, that facility was completed four years later in 2006.

Article URL: <http://starbulletin.com/2007/12/11/news/story02.html>  
© 1996-2008 The Honolulu Star-Bulletin | [www.starbulletin.com](http://www.starbulletin.com)