

## Dirty recycling dooms Hawaii County program

Council learns garbage mixed into two-bin system to blame

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West Hawaii Today

Garbage in, garbage out. Hawaii County's recycling program fell apart not because of a lack of markets, but because of dirty garbage dumped into the two-bin system, the Hawaii County Council learned Tuesday.

During a hearing that stretched into late evening, the council Committee on Agriculture, Water, Energy and Environmental Management was told that plastic and paper recycling is still going on through private small-scale programs where clean paper and plastic are separated at the source.

Business Services Hawaii, the island's sole recycling contractor, told the county last month it couldn't accept recycling from the mixed recycling program because it's not clean enough to be accepted by markets in China and Southeast Asia, where the materials are usually sent.

The two-bin program, which started in 2005, resulted in as much as 25% contamination with non-recyclable materials, Solid Waste Division Chief Greg Goodale said.

"It's easy for consumers, bad for the end market. ... We wanted to try to make it easy as possible for folks to deal with," Goodale said. "There was a lot of things going into those bins that shouldn't have got in those bins."

Business Services takes No. 1 and No. 2 plastics, cans, glass, cardboard, newsprint, office paper and paper bags from its commercial customers such as businesses and multifamily residences. The recycling company didn't participate in the council discussion and hasn't returned phone messages left by the newspaper.

Hawaii County, although not accepting plastic at its 16 waste transfer stations, continues to accept glass and cardboard and paper bags in separate bins at its recycling areas there, as well as cans at its scrap metal areas. The Hi-5 recycling program has not changed.

Testifier Kristine Kubat, an environmental activist, urged the county to go back to the separate bins that were used prior to 2005.

"What we're really experiencing here isn't a failure of the markets. It's a failure of the mixed recycling system," Kubat said. "When you have that one bin and you just tell people to throw everything in there, it just turns into something that's barely one grade above trash and nobody wants it. But there are markets for plastic. ... There are going to be markets for plastic. We just have to separate."

Puna Councilman Matt Kanealii-Kleinfelder suggested the county could more closely monitor what goes into its bins, either through increased staff, volunteers or help from the contractor.

"I'm worried. The Environmental Management Commission's job is to decrease the waste stream and that's our job," Kanealii-Kleinfelder said, "and by doing this, we're actually increasing our waste stream. We're

moving a step away from where our direction should be.”

The administration is working on a request for information to be sent out as a way to look at options and identify potential contractors to participate. It would use the information to create a request for proposals for alternatives. The council has also been looking at alternative technologies that might convert garbage into usable fuel or energy.

There’s still 100 years of capacity at the county’s landfill in Puuanahulu.

But it’s wasteful and increases the island’s carbon footprint to truck all the island’s garbage there, Kohala Councilman Tim Richards noted.

“It’s not about us. It’s not about this generation. It’s not even about the next generation,” Richards said. “What did you say, a hundred years of room? We have plenty of room for the next couple of generations, but that’s not the point.”



A mixed recycling bin in Keei shows mostly non-recyclable materials such as plastic bags, contaminated cardboard and a discarded device.

**Photo by Hawaii Solid Waste Division**