

Government contributes to problem of illegal dumping in Waimanalo

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Recent news reports about illegal dumping highlight the state and county's complicity in this serious problem in the Farm Lots section of Waimanalo Valley.

Waimanalo Valley has been a dumping ground since sugar plantation and early statehood days, when narrow dirt roads through 15-foot cane provided easy cover for trash, stolen cars and worse.

Starting in the mid-1980s, because of high transportation costs and dumping fees, commercial construction debris destined for Lualualei too often wound up in illegal landfills in our valley.

Over the last 40 years, commercial and industrial waste, stolen and abandoned cars, and trucks and trash are dumped several times a week in the valley. This trash comes from all over — Waimanalo is the closest “country” from town, Hawaii Kai and Kailua.

Commercial operators are one of the primary culprits. Instead of paying a commercial fee to dump waste — including asbestos, pesticides and other hazardous waste — it is cheaper and easier to drive to the windward side, dump the material on a dark back road or pay a state lessee a few dollars.

Inexplicably, the city and the state contribute to this problem in two ways: by not inspecting and maintaining public land; and not enforcing existing rules.

An example of government's failure to inspect and maintain is the Waimanalo 60 MG Reservoir Emergency Spillway Stream (Kahawai Stream), a natural waterway that is the reservoir safety-valve in the event of overtopping or breach.

The state Department of Agriculture (DOA) has not inspected or maintained the Spillway Stream in the 30 years of the reservoir's existence.

During heavy rains in recent years, the stream twice overflowed when it became congested with dumped debris and natural green waste, blocking a culvert, overtopping a bridge and stranding residents. The community cleared the debris with government help, but the problem continues to pose a danger when there is an emergency water release from the reservoir.

Despite community requests and the tragic lessons of Kauai's Ka Loko Dam disaster, the DOA still does not inspect or maintain the Emergency Spillway Stream in Waimanalo Valley.

A second problem is soil and water conservation district "cooperators" who are exempt from the Honolulu grading and filling ordinance, which regulates illegal dumping (["Land cooperators can skirt rules,"](#) Star-Advertiser, Dec. 9).

Many of these cooperators lease state agricultural land. But no state or county agency enforces the dumping ordinance:

- The landowner state Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) says it's for the city to enforce the grading and dumping ordinance.
- The city Department of Planning and Permitting says the Conservation District regulates its cooperators for illegal dumping.
- The Windward Conservation District board says they are volunteers, do not regulate, have no enforcement power and refer the complaint back to DLNR and DPP.

As a result of this Catch-22, violators go unpunished and illegal dumping continues. Conservation District cooperators are exempt from oversight or regulation for illegal dumping.

Despite repeated requests and a lawsuit, DLNR, DPP and the Conservation District each deny responsibility to regulate illegal dumping by Conservation District cooperators in Waimanalo Valley.

Prime agricultural farmland is being polluted while government

stands by and passes the buck.

In recent years, Waimanalo has seen a resurgence of farmers growing produce and fruits free of pesticides and chemicals. Numerous community organizations — such as the Waimanalo Agricultural Association, University of Hawaii Sustainable Ag Program, Go Farms, Malama Honua Charter School, Waimanalo Health Center and Hawaii Farmers Union United-Waimanalo Chapter — support, sustain and help grow our farming community.

Our state and county governments talk about advancing food independence and sustainability as one of our top priorities. Our schools teach it. Businesses promote it. Hopefully we all try to practice it in some way.

Government must be a part of the solution — not part of the problem — to stop illegal dumping in Waimanalo Valley.

Thomas Grande grows fruits and flowers in Waimanalo Valley; he is the plaintiff pro se in a lawsuit against the state, county and Windward Oahu Conservation District to remove an illegal landfill on state property.