



DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

News Release

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GOVERNOR

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GOVERNOR LINGLE ANNOUNCES ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES UNIT

HONOLULU - Governor Linda Lingle today announced the creation of a new Environmental Crimes Unit within the Department of the Attorney General.

The unit will investigate and prosecute environmental crimes that pose substantial risks to public health and the environment. These include violations of laws relating to air and water quality, solid and hazardous waste, underground storage tanks, pesticides, and restricted or regulated chemicals. The unit will also investigate and prosecute violations of environmental regulatory integrity, such as fraud, false reporting, and concealment.

The newly created unit is a cooperative effort between the state Attorney General, the state Department of Health, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"The State intends to maximize compliance and reduce threats to public health and the environment through an integrated approach of compliance assistance, interagency coordination, and vigorous civil and criminal enforcement, said Attorney General Mark Bennett."

"Protecting our Islands' environment and natural resources is a top priority for our Administration," said Governor Lingle. "This and this new environmental crimes unit will help strengthen the state's ability to be good stewards of the aina."

The Department of Health has reallocated emergency response funds for one year for two investigators, dedicated to conduct environmental crime investigations for the State, a Special Agent for Environmental Investigations and a Criminal Environmental Health Specialist. These dedicated investigators will be housed within the Department of the Attorney General, and will work closely with the Department of Health and the EPA Criminal Investigations Division.

Attorney General Mark Bennett has assigned two deputy attorneys general to prosecute these cases in state courts.

EPA Region IX and the EPA Office of Criminal Enforcement will provide support for this newly formed unit. "Criminal enforcement of environmental regulations is an important tool we use to address environmental violations," said Wayne Nastri, Regional Administrator for the EPA's Pacific

Southwest Region, who joined the Governor, attorney general and state deputy director for environmental health in making today's announcement. "The possibility of criminal prosecution, resulting in prison sentences along with severe monetary penalties should provide a deterrent to anyone thinking of or attempting to knowingly pollute Hawaii's pristine environment."

The EPA Office of Criminal Enforcement arranged for the special investigators and a deputy attorney general to participate in an Advanced Environmental Crimes Training Program at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) in Georgia in March. The EPA paid their tuition, travel expenses, and room and board. In September, an investigator will attend the EPA's Environmental Investigations Basic Course at FLETC, a course designed to train EPA agents.

The EPA has also been working with state and local agencies to enhance their capacity to investigate and prosecute environmental crimes in Hawaii. These agencies include the Department of the Attorney General, the Department of Health, the City and County of Honolulu, and the Honolulu Police Department.

"Vigorous enforcement of existing environmental law is essential, and a credible criminal enforcement program is an important part of environmental enforcement, said Laurence Lau, deputy director for environmental health administration. "We believe that much illegal dumping in the state is done to avoid the costs of proper disposal. Only the credible threat of jail can overcome pollution for profit."

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