

Maalaea boaters plan to pump

By *CLAUDINE SAN NICOLAS, Staff Writer*

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WAILUKU – To answer increasing public demands, the Maui Dive Shop and commercial boat operators in the Ocean Tourism Coalition have begun to retrofit their vessels to accommodate a sewage pump truck, instead of taking the legal option of dumping treated waste into the ocean.

“The boaters have always been very responsible,” acknowledged Madge Schaefer, chairwoman of the Governor’s Maui Council of Advisors.

For the third straight year, the council received testimony from swimmers and a residents group, Pump Don’t Dump, that wants the dumping of sewage into the ocean to stop. The practice is legal as long as boat operators are beyond the three-mile offshore zone whose parameters provide the limits of state-controlled ocean waters.

Members of Pump Don’t Dump have filed reports with the Governor’s Maui Council of Advisors detailing encounters ocean users have had with fecal matter in waters off of South and West Maui. The group claims that the human fecal matter spotted in the water is deposited by tour boat toilets.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Coast Guard’s Lt. Darwin Jensen reported he had no documentation of any violations of sewage dumping within three miles of Maui’s shores in the last four months. Jensen explained that he and his crew conduct routine boat inspections as well as random boardings on boats to ensure compliance with the law.

Schaefer also presented water-quality tests from the state Department of Health that showed no trace of any pollution or signs of fecal matter off beaches in South Maui, where representatives of “Pump Don’t Dump” have claimed violations occurred.

Maui Dive Shop General Manager Jeff Strahn along with Ocean Tourism Coalition Vice President Dave Howeth assured the governor’s council on Nov. 17 of their desire to be cooperative and do what is right.

“Commercial boat operators are stepping up to the plate, but it’s going to take time,” said Strahn.

Howeth said the coalition wants to be a part of the solution.

“We see it in a different light. This is our livelihood,” Howeth said. “We make a living on the fact that Maui is pristine.”

The coalition is encouraging all boat operators to retrofit their vessels so that sewage can be stored in a storage tank that can come to the shore for mobile dockside pumping. The retrofit

cost alone is estimated at \$2,000 per boat. The cost of using a private pump truck service is another \$30 per truckload plus labor expenses for the crew that has to oversee the pumping each time.

Coalition members are hoping that all commercial boat operators complete retrofitting by Dec. 15.

The first of Maui Dive Shop's vessels had retrofits completed Nov. 18 and had the first pump truck service on the same day in Maalaea.

"It went great. There were no problems," Strahn reported.

"The public wants this to be done. We want to be good citizens, and we don't want to damage the ocean."

Both Howeth and Strahn explained to the Maui council that the pump truck service is only a temporary solution until a long-term, permanent pump-out facility is provided by the state Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation, which manages the small boat harbors.

Schaefer said the advisory council will be recommending for the third straight year the construction of a permanent pump-out facility as a high priority for Maui.

"It continues to be a high priority for us," Schaefer said.

The coalition, according to Howeth, has met with Maui County Mayor Alan Arakawa, who is reported to be looking for funding to help defray the cost of a pump truck to service the vessels that do not have access to a pump-out facility.

Earlier this week, Schaefer said she hoped Arakawa will be able to come through with the funding, especially if commercial boat operators are going through the trouble of retrofitting their vessels.

Meanwhile, boat operators also are working with state Department of Land and Natural Resources staff at the Lahaina Harbor where there is a pump-out facility but it's not easily accessible. The Lahaina Harbor pump-out station is the only one on Maui for small-boat operators.

Lahaina Harbor users said they hope the state will be able to adjust the operations at the harbor to allow them to use the pump-out service more often and more efficiently.

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