

Written Testimony for the Environmental Management Commission

May 28, 2025

Agenda Item VI.2 – Recycle Hawai'i Update

Aloha Chair Perez and Commissioners,

I am writing to express my deep concern over a proposed project that, from what I understand, has already begun grubbing land in Shipman Industrial, Hilo to construct a plastic processing factory. The project is called Mālama One, and while it has been publicly marketed as a “state-of-the-art, never-before-seen” recycling facility, I—and many members of our community—have serious doubts and concerns.

Our current state regulations have not kept pace with modern science on the dangers of micro- and nanoplastics. These particles pollute our water, air, and bodies, and yet, because of outdated permitting structures, it appears this project may be exempt from the very oversight—solid waste permits, environmental assessments, and long-term impact reviews—that is so urgently needed.

At its supposed “peak performance,” Mālama One would import **52 million pounds of plastic per year** through Hilo Harbor. That's **1 million pounds of plastic every week**. Studies of similar operations around the world show that these kinds of plastic “reclamation” facilities typically **lose around 30% of the material** during processing. That means **300,000 pounds of plastic sludge waste per week** could be generated, trucked across Saddle Road, and dumped into our **only county landfill**—a landfill that is already nearing capacity.

This project is being framed as a climate solution, but the truth is: **there is no clean way to recycle plastic**. Scientific consensus shows that recycling plastic—especially by melting and reforming it—releases harmful particles into the environment, often undetected, and contributes further to global plastic pollution.

What's worse, by building this for-profit facility, we will actually **create an incentive to import more plastic to our islands**, locking us deeper into an extractive, polluting industry that directly threatens our people, our ecosystems, and our future.

I urge the Commission to do everything in its power to recommend that this project **not be allowed to move forward** without full regulatory scrutiny, public input, and updated environmental standards that reflect the reality of microplastic pollution.

Our water, air, soil, and bodies cannot afford this factory.

Mahalo for your time and for putting our communities and 'āina first.

Respectfully,
Cristina Holt
Hilo resident