



RECYCLE HAWAII TESTIMONY RE: 6/25/25 New Business Agenda Item V.2; A Presentation by Malama One

Plastic pollution presents an environmental crisis on par with climate change. It is found at all levels of biological organization, from cellular to planetary, generating grave impacts wherever it occurs. Although we have been conditioned from childhood to associate recycling with rainbows and dolphins, when it comes to plastic the process is dirty, toxic and does nothing to resolve the plastic pollution crisis. In fact it makes it worse, primarily by creating the false impression that we can continue to use plastic at current rates, but also by concentrating toxic chemicals in recyclates that are less stable than virgin plastic and therefore more prone to shedding the contaminated micro and nanoplastic particles that comprise them.

The only solution to plastic pollution is a steep reduction in plastic production and consumption—a minimum 75% according to experts actively working to solve the crisis. In the same way humans were compelled to phase out the use of lead for all but a limited range of highly controlled and regulated uses, we are now compelled to phase out plastic for all but the most necessary applications—with single-use items like beverage containers a top priority for elimination.

Malama One's claims that plastic recycling offers environmental benefits are false. The lifecycle analyses they point to that show plastic packaging is better for the environment because it weighs less and leads to a reduced carbon footprint for items shipped long distances fail to take the toxicity of plastic into account. Such false logic would also lead to the conclusion that nuclear bombs, which weigh less than conventional ones, do less damage to people and planet.

The arguments Malama One makes in favor of plastic recycling are couched within an imaginary context where plastic gets recycled continuously at rates that actually impact plastic production. This contextual premise is false because plastic is not infinitely recyclable and because the vast majority of bottles made from the thermoforms Malama One makes will end up outside Hawaii, where at least 70% of them will end up in a landfill, in an incinerator

or as litter. Most of the 30% that does get processed will end up downcycled into clothing or carpets that will go on shedding microplastics for as long as they are in use, after which they will end up in a landfill, in an incinerator or as litter. Malama One's efforts to turn single-use beverage containers into once-recycled beverage containers serves no other purpose than to trick consumers into thinking that the beverage industry, with its huge carbon footprint and insatiable demand for plastic, has magically become sustainable.

Each claim made by Malama One's promotional efforts can be similarly invalidated by applying science and good old fashioned common sense. Below commissioners will find links to just a few of the many well researched articles that can be relied on to formulate a position with regards to the risks associated with plastic usage as well as Malama One's claims that building a plastic recycling plant on Hawaii Island will address any of them.

Our assessment, as a legacy recycling organization active for over 30 years, is that the proposed project offers no benefits and will only undermine Hawaii's transition to a reuse economy. We also take the position that, contrary to Malama One's claims, in-state plastic recycling capacity will not enhance the effectiveness of Hawaii's Hi5 program, which was created to divert waste from our landfills.

Under the existing program, the majority of single-use plastic beverage containers ending up in Hawaii are shipped to industrial sites where a commitment to recycle plastic has already been made. As people the world over seek to reduce the volume of plastic produced and consumed by at least 75%, there is no justification for the expansion of the recycling industry's footprint. The infrastructure already in place will be more than sufficient to handle the volume of plastic that remains in the economy.

There is no good reason to subject Hawaii residents and visitors to the negative impacts that come with recycling single-use plastic beverage containers when we currently have a program that moves them out of state. Recycling these containers here will generate some volume of plastic waste that will then get sent to landfill. State of the art industry standards put that volume at about 30% of the feedstock processed. The claim that the Hi5 program is enhanced by sending a significant percentage of the plastic waste currently leaving our state to Hawaii Island's only landfill is patently absurd.

Another way Malama One's plan poses a risk to the existing Hi5 program is through its need to convince Hi5 redemption centers to end their

longstanding relationships with the certified recyclers that currently buy their plastic so it can be diverted to Malama One instead.

Plant closures due to economic and regulatory burdens are common within the recycling industry. Malama One's complete lack of experience operating and managing a plastic recycling center puts their venture at increased risk. Once local redemption centers have ended their business relationships with off shore recyclers they may never be able to restore them. To hedge against this outcome, local redemption centers will need to continue sending some portion of their plastic containers to out of state recyclers.

While this testimony focuses on issues that typically receive less attention, we urge the commission to consider the full scope of concerns raised in the attached articles and other opposing testimonies when weighing its duty to advise the county on environmental matters. In response to Malama One's plans to build a plastic recycling facility on Hawaii Island, we ask the commission to take the position that construction should not proceed until the Hawaii State Department of Health can promulgate rules regulating micro and nanoplastics as an emerging pollutant.

To this end, the EMC can recommend that the Hawaii County Department of Environmental Management refuse to take the plastic sludge the plant will generate until such rules are in place. Similarly, it can advise the county council to pass an ordinance that would ban the disposal of waste plastic sludge in Hawaii County landfills. The basis for this position is that plastic waste sludge will send micro and nanoplastic pollution into the leachate that is ultimately sent to the Kealahou Wastewater Treatment Plant. With the County already struggling to obtain an NPDES permit for this site, it does not need the additional burden of addressing the impact this pollution will have on its efforts to restore water quality along the Kona coastline.

The county does not need to bear the liability nor the brunt of public opposition associated with Malama One's ill conceived scheme.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

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RECOMMENDED SOURCES:

Science Direct: Microplastic Exposure and Obesity "Take-out food enhances the risk of MPs ingestion and obesity, altering the gut microbiome in young adults." Hong, et al 09/05/24. Link: [Microplastic Exposure and Obesity](#)

Nature Magazine: "Microplastic exposure linked to accelerated aging and impaired adipogenesis in fat cells." Hanbyeol Moon, et al. 10/13/24 Link: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-024-74892-6>

Forbes: Your Plastic Water Bottle May Be Making You Gain Weight: Christopher Thompson 8/19/24 Link: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christopherthompson/2024/08/19/your-plastic-water-bottle-may-be-making-you-gain-weight-microplastics/> 8/19/24

Center for Climate Integrity: "The Fraud of Plastic Recycling." Link: <https://climateintegrity.org/projects/plastics-fraud>

National Institutes of Health: "Microplastics: A Real Global Threat for Environment and Food Safety: A State of the Art Review." Ziani et al 1/25/23 Link: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9920460/>

National Institutes of Health: "Plastic Particles in Bottled Water" 1/23/24 Link: [Plastic Particles in Bottled Water](#)