



Pa'auilo Mauka Kalopa Community Association  
Photo courtesy of Karl Backus

## Monthly News & Updates

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### March 2020 Newsletter



#### An Island Dilemma: Recycling

By Ruth Bennett, PMKCA Vice President

Since last October our island has been reeling from the impact of changes to the county's trash management and recycling programs. I haven't heard of anyone who's pleased with the changes, and I'm afraid that the impact on residents and businesses will continue – until solutions are found and implemented.



**More plastic than our island knows what to do with!**

Our Pa'auilo Mauka and Kalōpā communities have only two nearby alternatives for trash disposal and recycling:

- The Honoka'a transfer station, which in the past has offered a full range of recycling options as well as being open every day, with a HI-5 buy-back facility open on weekends.
- The Pa'auilo transfer station, which is only open on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays and has NO recycling options at all.

In October, recycling was drastically limited at all trash and recycling transfer stations on the Big Island, including the Honoka'a location. Only a few types of recyclables are now accepted:

- Clean corrugated cardboard and brown paper bags (not cereal boxes or other packaging)
- Glass containers (no broken glass or sheet glass) – HI-5 glass containers can be separately returned for cash.
- Scrap metal, including small, clean cans (soup, pet food, etc.).

Many of us who have conscientiously recycled and reused and composted as much as we could have found ourselves looking at a growing pile of recyclable plastic containers and paper products accumulating on our properties. We couldn't find the "immoral fortitude" to throw these perfectly recyclable items in with the small amount of trash that we had tossed down the chute, destined for the Big Island's landfill!

And now we are told that, beginning March 1, 2020, the county will institute further restrictions:

- Only 1 "pick-up size" load will be allowed down the chute per day.
- Only 1 "white goods" item (large appliances, water heaters) per day.

There is another significant change that will affect the Honoka'a transfer station (as well as Hawi and Keauhou) on March 1:

- On Saturdays, only green waste will be accepted at the chute. NO TRASH. I think this means that a green waste container will be at the bottom of the chute, and all of its contents will be transported to one of the county's green waste sites.
- Conversely, on all OTHER days, NO GREEN WASTE will be allowed down the chute!

I know the county faces a dilemma, having lost the off-island partners who took our recycling materials to other places to be transformed into new products. The county officials, citing "shifting global recycling markets," say that they are seeking contractors who will recycle goods that are currently not collected at our transfer stations. They advise that contractors want CLEAN recycling products, to avoid "cross-contamination". The burden is on us to wash our cans and bottles (and plastics, if they are allowed in the future) before we put them in a recycling bin at a transfer station.



**"No Longer Accepted" - the reject list has gotten longer!**

Green waste converted into safe, usable and FREE mulch is a valuable resource returned to island residents, so it's hard to fault the county for this effort. The county Department of Environmental Management should be appreciated for collecting our throw-away vegetation, composting it at high temperatures and making it available to us. While they are taking care to keep invasive species (Little Fire Ants, Rapid 'Ohi'a Death) out of their final mulch product, it would be wise for users to check for unwanted pests in a quarantined area before use (see guidelines at [www.biisc.org](http://www.biisc.org)).

I guess we would all wish for solutions that don't restrict the way we use the county's transfer stations as we try to do the right thing, given our busy, complicated lives. I have a little garbage bin for non-recyclable trash, several recycle bins, a toxic substance area, a worm farm, a compost heap, a green waste pile and a wood stove. Many of you have the same. Our "last resort" garbage bins hold so little that we can't accumulate enough to make up a bag to take to the transfer station! We have all been proud of that – and we have been happy that the county partnered with us to make recycling work at all levels.

All that seems to be in a state of flux, or transition. I'm sure we could talk all day about whose fault it is that our island recycling programs have been so disrupted. That's not my direction here. What matters is what we – our communities and residents – can do to deal with this present dilemma and get ourselves to a better future. Some suggestions:

- Consider how you might cut down on the plastic containers that surround the products you are really buying. Bringing less recyclable material into your world means less you have to contend with later!
- Consider how you might reuse or repurpose an item so that it serves you, rather than contributes to our waste problem.
- Look for organizations around our island that are collecting plastics and turning them into useful products, keeping them out of the landfill. A good place to start is Hawaii Zero Waste ([www.hawaiiizerowaste.org](http://www.hawaiiizerowaste.org)).

- Take the time to wash plastic or canned food containers you intend to recycle either on- or off-island. Some items are used to educate children about recycling and shouldn't expose them to contaminants. Recyclables should not qualify as "hazmat" items for someone else.
- Look for ways that your community can make it easier to "do the right thing", now (with limited county options) and in the future. And give the county Dept. of Environmental Management a break... they are doing the best they can.
- Marshall the resources of the organizations to which you belong to influence county and state officials and agencies to fix our broken recycling processes.

PMKCA will be looking for ways to help our community through this current crisis and to advocate for a far better reuse and recycling plan for our island.

**Every person, every creature, every environment benefits when we reduce waste, reuse and recycle.**

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## Next Meetings

Here's a lineup of the next few PMKCA meetings:

**Thu, Apr 9, 2020 7PM** PMKCA Board of Directors Meeting  
Hawaiian Vanilla Co

**Thu, Jul 9, 2020 7PM** PMKCA Board of Directors Meeting  
Hawaiian Vanilla Co

**Sat, Jul 25, 2020 11AM** PMKCA Annual Potluck Picnic and  
General Meeting. Kalopa State Park

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