

Solid Waste Management

An ever-growing problem in Hawaii is solid waste management. According to The Department of Environmental Services, Oahu generates 2.2 million tons of trash a year, from residential, commercial, and industrial sources. After that trash is collected, it goes to either the Waimanalo Gulch Sanitary Landfill or the PVT Land Company in Nanakuli. The landfill in Nanakuli is meant for construction and demolition debris while the landfill in Waimanalo collects all other waste. Solid waste is a problem for the following reasons: space, pollution, and the overall aesthetics of Hawaii.

The American Dream is to have everything we have our heart set on. Not only is it not enough that we have everything we need, but we want everything bigger and better. But, is it all really necessary? Do we consumers really need all these things that clutter our lives, like little trinkets and charms that fill the shelves or counter tops of our homes? How often have we wanted the latest hot item only to later become bored with it and throw it out? Do you ever really consider where these once sought after things end up? It not just things that we own that is a problem. Consider as well the things we consume. The excesses we as humans demand require packaging. Our desire to consume is driving the ever growing supply of waste.

All the things we want and need eventually ends up in one of Oahu's landfills, but once all the landfills are full, more will need to be developed. This need for landfills to cater to our every growing supply of waste will, if left unchanged, create an issue of space. How much actual space is there on this island to make a new landfill every time a new one is needed? What will Oahu residents and or the environment have to sacrifice in order to make space for a landfill? Will farm lands have to be sacrificed in the future to make space? How about nature preserves or even residential areas? By world standards, Oahu is a small island that can only handle so much. Today we see the population growing and with more people there will be more consumption, leading to more waste. This is unsustainable for the island of Oahu and her residents.

Oahu, and Hawaii in general, sells itself to the world as a premiere tourist destination, but within our city and even on our beaches we see solid waste litter everywhere. Beach clean ups are often organized to address the unsightly litter, yet this act alone will not solve the problem of human behavior, in particular our desire for more things. More things that end up as litter or waste that fill up our streets, storm drains, beaches, waters, and landfills.

Addressing our waste issue here in Hawaii is going to need a change in our attitude and behavior. Our 'American Dream' needs a reboot. Life should not be measured by the objects we own, but instead by the experiences we have. Our values need to be rooted in the protection of the environment, the promotion of living minimally and valuing healthy human connections and relationships versus objects. As people of the land, we should demand that what we consume is responsibly sourced, manufactured, and packaged with renewable and biodegradable materials.

There is only one Hawaii and there is only one Earth. What we can do as a community is come together and pledge our refusal to our current practice of wanting and demanding more, more, more! Refuse that straw and plastic cap the next time you order a fountain drink. Say no to plastic bags for your groceries. Say no to buying things only to fill your house with knick-knacks. Put down that cellphone and fill the void you are trying to fill via products with real experiences and real connections with people. We should not let the waste we consume, consume us. Instead, we all need to come together and be the change that Oahu needs, that Hawaii needs, and that planet Earth needs.