

# Sewage topic of concern for committee

## THE CHAMBER VIEW

by Pamela Tumpap



During the Maui Chamber of Commerce's West Side Committee meeting this week, mem-

bers of the committee discussed their concerns about sewage capacity, sewage treatment and the ongoing smell that plagues the area.

Dave Taylor, Wastewater Reclamation Division chief in the Department of Environmental Management — a recently created department that takes a huge load off of the Department of Public Works — provided tremendous insight into the sewage challenges faced in Maui County.

Mr. Taylor first reviewed recent West Maui maintenance and replacement projects, and noted that the work being done right now is all about "rehabilitation." He said that while the county has lots of capacity, the systems are old and keeping the systems functioning is his division's primary responsibility.

The committee inquired about the odors by the Kaanapali Golf Course, asking about what is being done to address this problem. In his response, Mr. Taylor first

informed members about the causes. He noted that while sewage has inherent odors, odors increase with heat and the longer sewage remains in the pipes. He noted that higher levels of odors from the Lahaina system result from the long stretches of pipe as well as from the heat. He explained that it is a difficult problem to control and that people have different levels of sensitivity to hydrogen sulfide, which causes the smell. Mr. Taylor noted that the county is testing new bacteria that have been tested nationally, to see if they help eliminate the odor. However, the cost to eliminate the odor is not cheap, and this factor gets back to priorities.

Many options exist to address community concerns, such as reclaimed water and the elimination of odors, but significant costs come with these measures and it becomes a matter of addressing the main concerns.

A history lesson was helpful here. The committee learned that right now resources are going toward reliability — maintenance projects to keep sewage from spilling. The county owns 250 miles of underground lines. The federal government helped build these systems, but today there are no more federal subsidies. So, for the first time in history, the county will have to absorb the cost of maintaining its own sewage system. That's why we'll see an in-

crease of 18 percent on our next sewage bill (for those on the county system). This is just to maintain the service we currently have.

When asked about the prioritizing of projects, Mr. Taylor responded that the department provides a critical health service, and that priority is based on the needs of the countywide system, evaluated on a five-point safety scale to keep the system reliable. Decisions are not made area by area, but by addressing those areas requiring the most urgent upkeep. He noted that this year the department's budget is \$60 million, with \$26 million slated for construction projects to replace and rehabilitate the existing system.

Our sewer systems are quite old. Thirty to 40 years ago, the pipes were made of concrete and metal. These pipes now are deteriorating. Today PVC pipes are used, and, while the PVC life span is unknown, these pipes are expected to last for well over 100 years. So, as we address this critical infrastructure need today in Maui County and will for years to come, spending an estimated \$30 million each year for repairs and maintenance, the next generation may skip this challenge entirely due to the longevity of PVC pipes.

Given Mr. Taylor's comment regarding the length of the Lahaina system and the challenges it creates, a question was asked

about proactive future planning and whether or not smaller decentralized systems are beneficial. Mr. Taylor commented that the department is moving in the direction of smaller, decentralized systems. He noted that while he doesn't advocate for or against particular developments, developers who provide private systems — as would Honua'ula, formerly known as Wailea 670 — help the county meet resident needs and save the county in costs; since developers, not the county, build, maintain and upkeep these private systems.

The committee members asked numerous questions on various issues. The issues concerned use of reclaimed water to keep hillsides green for fire prevention; the environmental impact of the bacterial agent used to help control odors; and the injection wells affecting algae bloom. The recent press, current studies and a previous comprehensive study were discussed. The recommendation was that we carefully examine the science of the matter, before drawing any quick conclusions.

Our thanks go to Dave Taylor for his informative presentation that helped us to understand the many challenges the new Environmental Management Department faces in serving and protecting our community.

■ Pamela Tumpap is president of the Maui Chamber of Commerce.