

HEHA HERALD

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In Memory of
Charles Sumera
1/22/2010

President's Message

by Lori Nagatoshi

Aloha HEHA Members,

You might be wondering why I am writing the "President's Welcome" – well that's because our newly elected President, Amber Vuong, became a proud mother a few weeks ago and will be out on maternity leave. I wanted to congratulate Amber and wish her and her family well. Therefore, this section will be the Vice President's Welcome.

First of all, I wanted to thank all of the members for electing me as the Vice-President. I have been an active council member for a few years now and I feel honored to participate in the planning of our conferences

and workshops. I will try my best to uphold our HEHA constitution and by-laws by the 2010 HEHA Governing Council.

Last year was a difficult year, especially with all of the movement of positions and with the lost of an entire branch, which was a detriment to our membership. Another low moment was the cancellation of our annual conference due to budget.

On the brighter side, this is a new year and the council is ready to move forward and is planning two workshops and a conference. HEHA is planning to hold a Professional Development Workshop in June 2010, a technical workshop in Sep-



tember 2010, and the annual conference in December 2010.

I am looking forward to this upcoming year as your Vice-President, and I anticipate that there will be challenges ahead of us but I am sure that the Governing Council and I will work diligently to resolve any issues that arise and always guide HEHA towards our purpose.

Best wishes,
Lori Nagatoshi
2009-2010 HEHA Vice-
President

Sanitation Program Initiatives

by Peter Oshiro, Oahu Sanitation

As of January 22, 2010 there were approximately 5,860 permitted food establishments on Oahu that the sanitation branch has regulatory oversight. With the current staffing of 10 field sanitarians the ratio per sanitarian to food establishments on Oahu is 1:586. The DOH Sanitation branch is participating in the US FDA sponsored and endorsed Voluntary National Retail Food

Regulatory Program Standards in which Hawaii's food sanitation program is pursuing to achieve national uniformity in retail food protection. In these Program Standards the US FDA recommends that the ratio for a full time food inspector per food establishment not to exceed 1:150. The US FDA recommendation also stipulates that the food inspector limits his or her activities only to food

establishment inspections and responses to complaints. The FDA recommended 1:150 ratio should be the benchmark staffing level.

The Sanitation program is proposing that the number of field sanitarians on Oahu be increased from 10 to 28. This would lower the ratio of sanitarians per food establishments to 1:209. Maui currently has 1283 food

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“Seafood Imposter”

by Layne Belen, Food & Drug

As 2009 ended, we learned of a fish called walu being labeled and sold as Hawaiian butterfish at stores and restaurants. Food and Drug Inspectors observed the misbranded fish at the retail level and worked to make sure the labels were changed. This situation has serious ramifications not only for economic reasons (actual butterfish can be rare and expensive) but for health reasons as well.

Walū, also known as escolar, is a fish which contains a high level of oil in its tissue because it cannot digest the wax esters that it consumes in its diet. While these are beneficial to the escolar's survival in the deep sea, they can be brutal to the human's digestive system. Gastrointestinal symptoms of ingesting too

much escolar include oily orange diarrhea, discharge, or leakage from the rectum that can occur without warning a half hour after consumption and lasts about one day. Strict portion control of no more than six ounces is the recommended method of preventing or minimizing the symptoms.



Therefore, not only should the fish be labeled with a warning when served, but it should not be incorrectly labeled as Hawaiian butterfish.

Actual butterfish, or sablefish, is commonly found in the deep ocean waters off the Pacific North-

west coast. Most sablefish for sale in the United States comes from U.S. commercial fisheries, mostly in Alaska. The flesh is quite oily, white, soft in texture, with a mild flavor. Considered a delicacy in many countries for its sweet taste and flaky texture, it is also very high in omega-3 fatty acids.

When prepared, walu and butterfish can taste and appear very similar. That is why consumers and food preparers alike should be aware of the differences between the two fish. Consumers should make an informed decision before deciding to eat or purchase escolar, taking note of its potential adverse effects and verifying species with the retailer or food pre-

parer. Such misrepresentation is considered serious enough that there is currently a proposal before the 2010 Hawaii Legislature (HB 2669) to ban the sale of walu altogether.

For more information see:

Fish Watch – U.S. Seafood Facts, National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA, www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch/species/sablefish
Seafood Watch, www.MontereyBayAquarium.org
Escolar, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Escolar
Sablefish, www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sablefish
Sablefish, www.answers.com/topic/black-cod
H.B. No. 2669, A Bill for an Act, Relating to Walū, www.capitol.hawaii.gov

Cooperation is the Name of the Game

by Michael Robless, Health Educator

Just imagine, it is 4:00am in the morning, and the Environmental Health (EH) department has received notice from the Civil Defense that there has been an accident on board the “Pride of America” which is scheduled to dock at the harbor at approximately 7:00am. Because this is a holiday weekend and the EH staff is shorthanded, how is EH going to handle this situation?

This is a scenario that could possibly happen anywhere, anytime in the state, and how will the Envi-

ronmental Section of the State Department of Health going to respond? A question that should be asked, and answered with is the cooperation of all sections, programs, and divisions within the Department of Health.

On Kauai, there is a state of joint cooperation within each section in the District Health Office. During the “Stop Flu at School” campaign, clinics were not only run by the Public Health Nurses, but other sections within the District Health Office contributed

time and manpower to the success of the flu campaign. Not only did the staffers from the Environmental Health section work as Safety Officers, Traffic Controllers and, Registrants but also served as Clinic Managers at various clinics around the island. Public Health Nurses (PHN) and Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP) staffers were trained in the 24hr HAZMat class. Both PHEP and PHN's staffers exercised with EH during the Annual Civil Support Team Exercise (CSTX) with

the 93rd CST team from Oahu.

Cooperation within the Kauai District Health Office has been paramount for the successes the District Health Office has had during the various exercises, drills, and flu campaigns it has participated in.

A call goes out to the EH staff to be ready to meet the “Pride of America” and alongside the EH staff will be other staff members from PHN, the Lab and PHEP to assist the EH team in receiving the “Pride of America” as she docks.

NEHA RS/REHS: To Be or Not To Be

by John Nakashima, RS

As one of the 125 or so individuals that were left without our RS license at the end of 2008, at first I did not know what to make of it. But as time went on it was similar to the situation where you have something for so long you take it for granted, until it is no longer there. Then comes the feeling of “what happened” and “why did it happen.” Personally it did become somewhat of a sore-point. You may ask what is the big deal? Our state rules no longer requires a Licensed Sanitarian to perform inspections, any duly authorized agent can do the job. However, I as all the others who had achieved the status of Registered Sanitarian and endured the hours of studying and the examination that followed to attain that designation did become one of an elite group. As boisterous as this sounds we must remember, sanitarians were the original Environmental Health Generalist. The Registered Sanitarian not only knew about Food Safety, but they also had knowledge about other environmental

issues, such as radiation, pollution, swimming pools, government rules and laws. As I studied for the examination I could not believe that one individual would need to know this many subjects, but this is what being a Registered Sanitarian is all about.

After the loss of the RS License I personally wanted to try and obtain either my RS or REHS credential. One avenue would be through the National Environmental Health Association (NEHA) who offers a RS/REHS credential. Luckily in 2009 the Hawaii Environmental Health Association (HEHA) was able to work out a reciprocity agreement with NEHA. An “open window” was created from December 2009 to November 30, 2010 whereby any individual who held a State of Hawaii Registered Sanitarian License at the end of 2008 would be offered an opportunity to obtain a NEHA RS/REHS Certification by completing an application for certification. If you miss this “open window” the applicant

would need to complete all the regular requirements for obtaining the RS/REHS including the examination. In December 2009 I filed my application and received my certification about a month later. Now I can proudly add the designation ‘RS’ after my name and once again I belong to this elite group of individuals. There will always be a negative side presented and the most common statement I hear is “how does getting my ‘RS’ benefit me?” The acquisition of your ‘RS’ will not make a difference in your current state position if you are a Sanitarian, but if you should leave the state and seek other employment; these 2 letters will mean much more. There are still many jurisdictions that require some certification for employment, many private businesses look at these certifications when selecting employees. Although the ‘RS’ is not required at this time, there is a great movement nationwide for credentialing of Environmental Health personnel and we may see a return in the fu-

ture as all jurisdictions seek more qualified personnel. Maintaining a highly qualified professional is difficult, the RS certification requires it owners to have at least 24 hours of continuing education every two years, ensuring that the Certification owners keep abreast of current trends.

The ‘RS’ as I mentioned earlier is one of the highest levels of Environmental Health Professional existing. The term “professional and professionalism” is tossed around very loosely today; we hear it said that we are all “professionals”, but what does this all mean? In my book to be a professional means to carry a sense of pride in what you do, and who you are. This is why I have decided that I want to be a ‘RS’ and be proud of my accomplishments. Take pride in yourselves and all that you have achieved, do not let all of your hard work go to waste. I hope all of you will be in joining me as a credentialed Registered Sanitarian (RS). If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Wash and Prepare

by Takako Nakaaki, Maui District Health office

This is the time to think about **hand washing before preparing food and whenever your hands are contaminated.** Environmental health specialists and food managers are in a unique position to promote this simple but important step by food handlers. There are many diseases

such as *Salmonella*, *Shigella*, Hepatitis A, and *Norovirus*, that are passed on to us via the fecal oral route. These diseases can affect food handlers as well as their clients. CDC has estimated that as many as half of all food-related outbreaks of illness may be caused by *Norovirus* and in many of

these cases, sick food handlers were implicated. However, we can prevent this transmission with one simple step, wash your hands. It is important to remind food handlers that you encounter during your food inspections of the proper way to wash their hands and when to wash their hands.

We sometimes forget that some people do carry infectious pathogens in their gastrointestinal tract without showing symptoms. If an asymptomatic food handler prepares a meal for your family or friends, contaminates the food product with his/her dirty hands, it may be possible to pass the

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Wash and Prepare

cont.

microorganisms to you and others who consumed this contaminated food. It is really important for anyone handling food to practice good hand washing regardless of having symptoms.

How about alcohol-based hand gels?

Alcohol-based hand gels can be used to sanitize your hands if there is no soap or water to wash your hands. However, alcohol-based hand gels should not replace the use of soap and warm water to wash dirty hands.

The FDA reminds us of three important facts regarding the use of

alcohol-based hand gels for **food handlers:**

- Alcohols have very poor activity against bacterial spores, protozoan oocysts, and certain nonenveloped (nonlipophilic) viruses
- Ingredients used in alcohol-based hand gels for retail or food service must be approved food additives, and approved under the FDA monograph or as a New Drug Application (NDA)
- Retail food and food service work involves high potential for wet hands and hands contaminated with proteinaceous material. Sci-

entific research questions the efficacy of alcohol on moist hands and hands contaminated with proteinaceous material.

So, proper hand-washing, as described in the Food Code continues to serve as a vital and necessary public health practice in retail and food service.

Let's stay on top of good hand washing practice in food establishments and in the home, so we all can stay healthy.

References:

FDA Fact Sheet on Hand Hygiene in Retail & Food

Service Establishments

www.fda.gov/Food/FoodSafety/RetailFoodProtection/IndustryandRegulatoryAssistanceandTrainingResources/ucm135577.htm

CDC Fact Sheet on Norovirus in Foodhandlers

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvrd/revb/gastro/norovirus-foodhandlers.htm

Hawaii Department of Health Poster: Handwashing Technique

<http://hawaii.gov/health/environmental/sanitation/sanitationguidelines/handwashinghandout.pdf>

Sanitation Initiatives *cont.*

establishments and has only 3 RS IV's in the field and their staffing ratio is at 1:428 and is poised to receive three additional positions to bring their ratio down to 1:214. Even though all islands will still be significantly above the recommending workload, (1:150), it will be a significant improvement to existing staffing levels. Kauai's ratio is at 1:193 and the Big Isle is at 1:198. The extra staffing will allow the Sanitation program to make more frequent inspections of the establishments with the greatest number of food-borne illness risk factors. The lower ratio will also improve the sanitarians response to their multi-function role in food safety, community sanitation, and emergency preparation and response.

The Statewide Sanitation staff has also shown to be invaluable during times of

disasters. The Registered Sanitarian license requirement ensures that the incumbents must demonstrate a high level of understanding of ALL facets of Environmental Health under the purviews of the [EHSD] Environmental Health Services Division and [EMD] Environmental Management Division. This was clearly shown during post Hurricane Iniki recovery, when Reg. Sanitarians were the preferred disaster worker on Kauai due to the wide scope of their expertise in the field with regards to all environmental programs. The wide scope of expertise also places a lower demand on scarce resources within a post disaster environment. The Reg. Sanitarians are able to do multiple duties that overlap all environmental health programs. Increasing the Sanitation Branch posi-

tion count also increases the ability of the state to mobilize a staff of highly skilled, multi-disciplined DOH employees to protect public health.

The philosophy of doing the best we can with an understaffed program and lets all take our chances with the final product produced (inadequate surveillance of food establishments) should be changed to doing an excellent job by an appropriately staffed program that can provide the public with an assurance that a reasonable amount of time is spent with retail food establishments that are of the highest risk to their health. Proper staffing of the Sanitation Branch will also provide the DOH with a pool of personnel from an environmental health program that has shown in the present and past to be one of the most

reliable, quick responding, and multi-disciplined staff when responding to emergency situations or disaster response.

At present, the program has reviewed the offerings of various vendors in order to establish a web-based permitting and inspection program. The vendors we have looked at are able to set up a web based system that will bring us up to par with other state and county health departments, by achieving the following goals:

- Allow the regulated community to apply and pay for all permits on-line.
- Allow existing permit holders to access their records. (Permit expiration dates and fees, previous inspection results, etc.).

- Allow the general public to

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Sanitation Initiatives *cont.*

access the most recent inspection results of any of our permitted food establishments.

- Allows the general public to access any legal enforcement results.
- Allows the departments to more efficiently manage and track the work of DOH employees.
- Reduce the volume of clerical work due to the capability of automatically downloading inspection results directly into the database. No keypunch entry needed by the existing clerical staff which will allow them more time towards customer service.

Prior to 1996, there was in place a scored, graded inspection system based on a 100 point perfect score. This was combined with a placard system that issued a green card for a score of 70 or above, an amber card if there was an "Intent to Suspend" action, and a red card for a permit suspension. The above system was abandoned in 1996 in favor of an inspection that reflected critical versus non-critical violations.

We are now proposing a placard system as a substitution for the 100 point grading system. The goals of the placard program are to:

- Reduce the incidence of major violations in the Food Establishment, thus reducing the risk of the public contracting food-borne illnesses or being exposed to harmful contamination.
- Increase compliance w/ food safety laws.

- Convey meaningful inspection results to the public and food service industry using a system that is simple to understand.

- Reward the Food Establishment for "Excellence in Food Safety."

A green placard is issued when no more than one major violation is observed. The major violation must be corrected or mitigated at the time of the inspection. Minor violations must be corrected within the time frame given on the inspection report. A re-inspection may be conducted if any of the violations are not permanently corrected in a timely matter.

A yellow conditional pass placard is issued when two or more major violations are observed; when any uncorrected major violation is observed during a follow-up inspection, or when a "Notice of Violation and Order" has been filed. These violations must be corrected or mitigated at the time of inspection. A re-inspection WILL be conducted within 24-72 hours to ensure that ALL major violations remain corrected. Minor violations must be corrected within the time frame given on the inspection report. If all major violations are corrected during the re-inspection, a GREEN PASS placard will be issued at the re-inspection.

A Red Closed placard is issued when an imminent threat to public health and safety is observed and/or if the Food Establishment Permit has been suspended/

revoked. Examples of imminent health hazards include: Food borne illness outbreak determined by State Epidemiologists, presence of surfacing or overflowing sewage within the establishment, no water available, no power available, severe rodent/insect infestation, or severe unsanitary conditions. The Red closed Placard must remain posted and the facility closed until a re-inspection is conducted to confirm that the imminent health hazard no longer exists or the permit has been re-instated. A green placard will be issued at the re-inspection if all is well.

Two Green Placards in a row for routine inspections will result in a special recognition placard issue to the Food Establishment for "Food Safety Excellence" for the year in which the second green placard in a row is earned. The establishment may post this placard permanently.

A Green, Yellow, or Red Placard will be issued at the end of each routine inspection and re-inspection. The placard must be posted by the Sanitarian at the front door or window at the main entrance, facing outward. We will offer training classes at no cost to any operator on "How to Obtain and Maintain a Green Placard". The specific criteria for the placard program as well as basic food safety training will be reviewed in each class.

The statewide sanitation program already has the training component in place as we have two very

adaptable full time Registered Sanitarians that presently run the Food Safety Education Training program.

In conclusion, the food safety program in Hawaii must be given the proper tools to safeguard public health. Failure to do so may one day result in permanent injury or deaths to our residents and visitors to the State. The resulting bad press could further hinder efforts of recovery for our tourist industry. The State Government and the food service industry must stop being penny wise and pound foolish and must make a decision to properly fund one of the most basic functions of State government. It is very clear that the industry cannot and will not police itself due a lack of will and food safety knowledge. The Sanitarians in the field are the sole source of food safety knowledge and expertise for the owners and managers of food establishments in Hawaii, as there is no mandatory food safety knowledge required in order to open up a retail or wholesale food establishment in the State. Very Frightening!!

The saddest thing is that a very small investment of **70 CENTS PER DAY!!! per food establishment** would give us the necessary funding to accomplish all of the above goals. HB 2688 has been introduced this year in an attempt to obtain funding needed to accomplish these goals. We could only hope that the Department finally chooses to support this bill and that the Governor will not veto it again.

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