



ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES CASE STUDY

Partnering for a healthy and sustainable Hawaii

The Green Growth Initiative (GGI) brings together a diverse group of leaders to promote “food, energy and ecosystem security for a sustainable, resilient and prosperous future.”¹ As an active member of this coalition, the Hawaii Department of Health, Environmental Health Administration brought a health-based perspective to the environmental and economic discussions. One significant public health issue – solid waste disposal – has become a priority for the GGI and together, they have proposed solutions that can benefit both coalition partners and communities.

A Changing Hawaii

Across communities in Hawaii, there is a growing understanding about the links between the economy and the environment, and the changes that need to be made to ensure a healthy and sustainable future. Sea level rise, coastal flooding and other climate change impacts pose a significant threat to a state where much of the population lives near the shore.

With over 2,000 miles to its nearest neighbor, Hawaii is also the most geographically isolated place on earth. This poses a challenge when 85% of its energy and about 90% of its food is imported.¹ Dependence on imports creates additional vulnerabilities to the local impacts of climate change.

Working Together for Sustainability

Recognizing these issues, Hawaii's agency and community leaders have been proactively working to reduce dependence on fossil fuels. In 2007, a state law created a framework for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. Several other statewide reports followed that have highlighted the issues, and the Hawaii Green Growth Initiative (GGI) was formed to take action on these issues through strengthening political support, building multisectoral partnerships and showcasing Hawaii's successes. The GGI brings together partners from state agencies (health, agriculture, natural resources, planning), private businesses, foundations, nonprofits, community members, landowners and universities to meet ambitious targets like attaining 70% of energy from renewable sources and conservation and doubling local food production by 2030.¹

Turn for more »

Public Health Concerns

The Hawaii State Department of Health (DOH) has been an active leader in the GGI. Reducing solid waste generated in Hawaii has been a priority of the DOH's Environmental Health Administration for years. Waste cannot be easily disposed of in the mountainous inland of islands, so landfills are located on the coastline, where much of the population lives. The municipalities have been promoting and supporting recycling in recent years, and the system is still growing and expanding.

Curbside collection has helped get 80% of Honolulu residents to participate in recycling programs, but there are currently few local options for residents to recycle electronic waste. Metals in electronics can cause toxic contamination of water and soil if not disposed of properly. Solid waste disposal can also create health disparities, as landfills are often located in lower income communities and illegal dumping occurs in the same communities.

Partnering for Solutions

A major strength of the GGI is that partners can bring actionable solutions to the group for consideration and support. The DOH brought the electronics waste recycling issue to the GGI in 2011, and it quickly became a priority for the group. A focus group was developed with

relevant stakeholders, and they worked together to identify priorities and craft statewide legislation to expand statewide recycling programs to include electronics. GGI has provided testimony and lent its support to increasing the amount of product collection and recycling that manufacturers are required to do. A standard recycling requirement has yet to be settled by lawmakers.

Although the legislation has not yet passed, the DOH has been able to partner with the GGI to combine resources to raise awareness about this solution to a prominent community issue.

The success of this GGI lies in its ability to narrow the term “sustainability” into actionable goals and timelines with support from a broad spectrum of groups. The electronics recycling bill will be presented to the legislature again in the next session with continued support from the GGI.

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1. Global Island Partnership. "Hawaii Green Growth Initiative." Available at <http://glispa.org/commitments/hawai-i-green-growth-initiative>. Accessed 10-7-2014.

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Health in All Policies is a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking and programming across sectors, and at all levels, to improve the health of all communities and people.

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