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West Hawaii Today

WEDNESDAY, JULY 26, 2017

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Water Board seeks well break answers

Repair work bid, parts accepted; one for Honokohau rejected

BY NANCY COOK LAUER
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HILO — What went wrong and how to prevent it from happening again were topmost on the minds of members of the county Water Board on Tuesday, as they heard an update on well breakdowns in West Hawaii.

The board unanimously agreed to spend \$152,000 for backup pumps and motors for the Hawaiian Ocean View Estates and Halekii wells, but learned that backup equipment for the Honokohau well, estimated at \$215,000, didn't meet the bid requirements and had to be rejected. The

department plans to continue pursuing a purchase under state procurement laws.

The board also unanimously approved a \$987,635 bid from Beylik Drilling & Pump Service Inc. to repair the Kalaoa No. 1 well. The well is currently working but is one of the top high-level wells in the area and

needs to be repaired "in advance of failure," said Keith Okamoto, manager and chief engineer for the Department of Water Supply.

With four of the area's 13 wells under repair, North Kona has been under mandatory water restrictions since January, requiring a 25 percent reduction

in water usage. The restrictions are expected to remain in effect even after the Waiaha Deepwell comes back on line July 31. Repairs at three other wells are set for completion by the end of the year.

Okamoto and Clyde Young, the lead mechanical engineer, said no one factor caused so many wells to break down in

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ARSON BUSTS HARD TO COME BY

\$5K reward still offered for info leading to arrest, conviction in fire cases

BY TIFFANY DEMASTERS
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KAILUA-KONA — The number of suspicious wildfires continues to grow as authorities are now investigating a series of blazes along Highway 190 this month.

The recent string of fires police are investigating occurred over the past two weekends. Officials are also investigating a brush fire in Waimea that scorched 2,200 acres of land on July 7.

Founders of the nonprofit organization Daniel R. Sayre Memorial Foundation, in support of the Hawaii Fire Department, wanted to remind the public of a \$5,000 reward fund set up within the foundation 10 years ago. The money rewards those who have information that lead to the apprehension and conviction of those responsible for arson.

"Anytime firefighters go out to unnecessary fires, it takes away from something else they could be doing and eats up funding," Laura Mallery-Sayre, co-founder of the foundation.

The most recent suspicious fire being investigated occurred at 4:30 a.m. July 21. Hawaii Police Maj. Robert Wagner said an abandoned vehicle was found on fire on Highway 190 at mile marker 30.

Several small brush fires were reported in the same area the weekend before that. The first was discovered at about 3:30 p.m. on July 15 at about mile marker 29 on Mamalahoa Highway, also known as the upper road. The second was hours later at 7:45 p.m., a half mile up the road. The third fire was spotted July 16 at 1:35 p.m. at mile marker 30, north of the Makalei Golf Course area.

"The last string of fires in the Kona area were all



Homes were evacuated in the Komohana Kai subdivision of Kailua-Kona after a brush fire broke out in 2016. COURTESY BARBARA UECHI

suspicious," said Hawaii Fire Department Chief Darren Rosario.

The chief added the blazes are similar in nature and could be connected.

When the arson fund was first set up in 2007, the fire department responded to nine brush fires set along the South Kohala coast. The blazes scorched 9,000 acres and threatened homes and nearby resorts.

After the fund was set up, Rosario said, they saw

a reduction in suspiciously set fires. Unfortunately, the number of intentionally set fires has crept back up with no conviction results.

In March 2016, the foundation and fire department renewed attention to the fund after about a dozen suspicious fires flared up in West Hawaii.

Since Rosario became chief in 2011, he said, there have been no convictions in arson wildfires.

"They're hard to solve

because we really rely on eye-witness statements," he said.

Rosario added any evidence left behind at the scene is usually burned up.

"We just want the public to know to be vigilant — call if they see something suspicious," Rosario said. "Each fire does increase hazards to the community and firefighters."

The chief said it's difficult to catch an arsonist.

"You have to have someone step up from the community who saw it or the individual gets caught right away," Rosario said.

The public is encouraged to report any suspicious activity that could lead to the arrest and conviction of the suspected arsonist(s).

Rosario encouraged residents to report vehicles and license plate numbers if seen parked along the

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Kealahou High School teacher Justin Brown listens to Dr. Chip Fletcher's presentation on climate change Tuesday afternoon at Waimea Elementary School. LAURA RUMINSKI/WEST HAWAII TODAY

Tough talk Scientists, teachers discuss uphill battle of educating community on climate change

BY MAX DIBLE
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WAIMEA — It was another case of the usual suspects.

What Dr. Chip Fletcher, of the University of Hawaii at Manoa's School of Ocean and Earth Science Technology, set out to accomplish Tuesday afternoon in the Waimea School Cafeteria is encompassed by the same basic goal to which climate

scientists have aspired for decades — to educate the public on the scientific truth of climate change.

But his efforts, as well as the demographics of the crowd of roughly 50 people to whom Fletcher spoke, highlighted the creeping redundancy of his message and the tangible difficulty of spreading it into larger segments of society.

In other words, Fletcher found himself preaching

to the converted.

"You have got a high percentage of this area that will not show up to this kind of presentation and will not listen to this," said Chantal Chung, who works for the UH Sea Grant College Program. "Even though Dr. Fletcher is brilliant in the way he presents the information, he is preaching to the choir in this room. And it's not the people in this room that need to be

accessed. It's the people who will never step inside of this room."

So why won't more in the community come? Why won't they engage?

Where could the message be more relevant than on an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, where, according to Fletcher, sea levels will rise at a 25 percent greater clip than in any other

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Want a car with that condo?

Hawaii developer offers leased Mercedes-Benz to buyers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HONOLULU — A developer in Honolulu recently began offering consumers a Mercedes-Benz on a three-year lease if they buy a unit in one of three towers.

Howard Hughes Corp. is offering the Mercedes incentive along with a few others in an attempt to spark sales at three of its towers, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported on Monday. Hughes Corp. also is trying to give real estate agents extra motivation for getting customers to buy Ward Village condos, offering to advance brokers 75 percent of their sale commission.

The third incentive offers to pay for the sale commission expense of a homeowner who sells their home and buys a Ward Village condo.

“We think that’s pretty exciting,” said Bill Pisetsky, the developer’s senior vice president of sales and marketing.

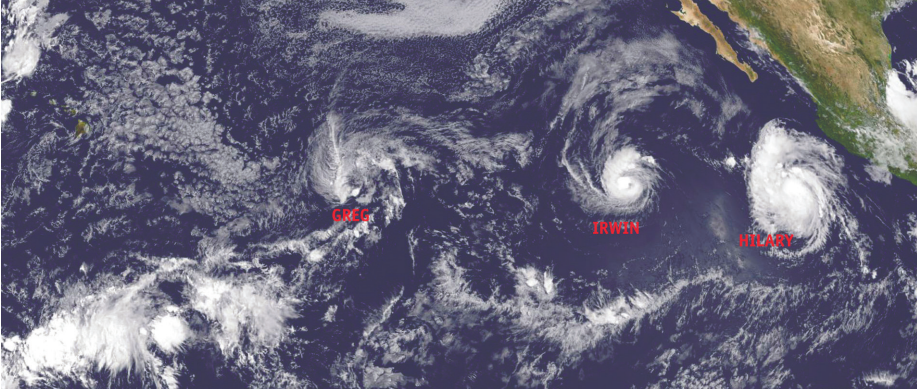
For the third incentive, there are some limits on the commission amount in

case the condo buyer sells a home worth far more than the one purchased, Pisetsky said.

Hughes Corp. has a master plan that envisions development of 16 towers with 4,300 homes along with 1 million square feet of retail and restaurant space on its 60-acre (243,000-square-meter) property known as Ward Centers. The company recently reported that Waiea and Anaha are almost sold out and Ae’o is about two-thirds sold.

About 10 units priced from \$4.4 million to \$36 million are available at Waiea, which has 174 units. At the 317-unit Anaha, about 15 units remain for \$2.9 million to \$14 million. And at Ae’o about 175 of 466 units remain unsold and are priced at \$800,000 to \$2 million.

“As we move into sales of our new projects, we will always be on the lookout for fresh and innovative ways to market our existing inventory,” said Andrea Galvin, a Hughes Corp. spokeswoman.



Forecasters are keeping tabs on Tropical Depression Greg, Hurricane Irwin and Hurricane Hilary in the Eastern Pacific. NASA/NOAA/SPECIAL TO WEST HAWAII TODAY

Greg weakens to tropical depression

BY CHELSEA JENSEN
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KAILUA-KONA — Greg weakened to a tropical depression early Tuesday as it continued to make its way toward the state.

As of Tuesday evening, Tropical Depression Greg was located 1,115 miles east of South Point, packing 35 mph winds and traveling northwest at 14 mph, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami. Forecasters expect Greg to continue weakening as it encounters cooler waters and a drier, more stable atmosphere.

It could be downgraded to a remnant low by Wednesday evening, shortly after entering the Central Pacific, which is where Hawaii is located.

Behind Greg is Hurricane Irwin, which was packing 90 mph winds as it tracked west at 8 mph some 2,250 miles east of the Big Island. Gradual weakening is forecast during the next few days as the storm moves over cooler waters and encounters wind shear.

After that time, Irwin is expected to interact with Hurricane Hilary, and because it has the smaller circulation of the two, it is likely to lose intensity, forecasters said. Some global models show Irwin becoming absorbed into Hilary’s circulation by the weekend.

Little change in strength is forecast during the next 48 hours. Thereafter, gradually cooling water temperatures, drier air and interaction with Hurricane Irwin is likely to cause more weakening.

CLIMATE:

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

ecosystem on the planet, where intensified tropical storms can wreak economic and social devastation over night?

There are those who still question the science of climate change. Then there are those who acquiesce to the data, but question humanity’s role in the process. After all, climate change has occurred naturally throughout the planet’s history and will continue long after humans become extinct.

But Fletcher, Chung and her counterpart Carree Edens, who also attended Tuesday’s presentation, didn’t identify skepticism as the reason a cafeteria in Waimea filled up with so many familiar, already-converted faces instead of new, inquiring ones.

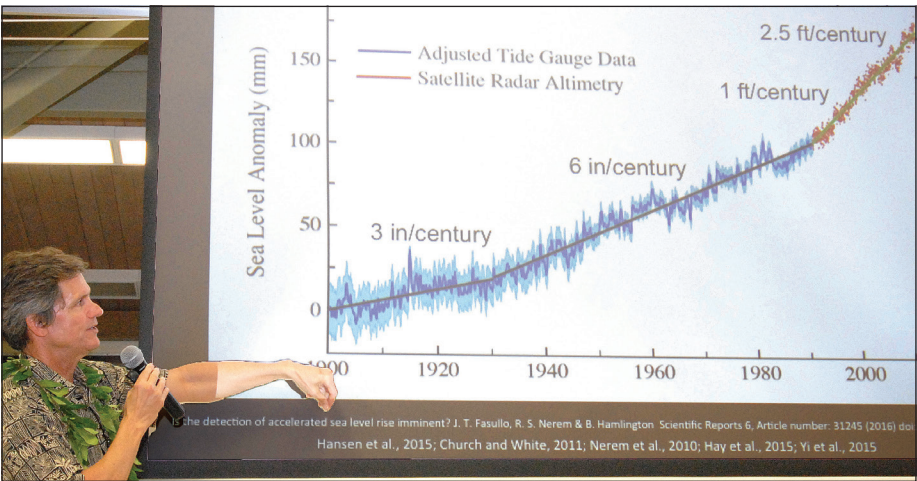
Instead, they explained the reason as denial manifesting from a combination of negativity and the inaccessibility of the abstract.

“When people are faced with too much negativity, they stop listening,” Fletcher said.

Chung took it a step further, calling the topic “overwhelming and depressing.” In her opinion, however, what’s more important is the somewhat intangible quality of overwhelming and depressing facts mixed with harsh economic realities.

“People are aware this is going on, but it hasn’t hit them personally yet,” she said. “Or they’re at a point where they are so focused on daily survival. When people are barely keeping their heads above water for their basic daily needs, how is it that we’re expecting them to think globally about something that doesn’t impact their everyday lives?”

“But what they don’t understand is what’s keeping them down,” Chung



Dr. Chip Fletcher makes a presentation on climate change at Waimea Elementary School cafeteria Tuesday afternoon. LAURA RUMINSKI/WEST HAWAII TODAY

continued. “The economics keeping them under water — the price of food, the price of gas — it’s all related to (climate change). But that connection to their lives hasn’t been made yet.”

Fletcher illustrated the impact of climate change beyond mere weather events with an example of a drought in the Middle East, particularly Syria.

Of course, the civil war raging in that country has been the largest factor in its massive outflow of refugees, but climate change has contributed. And as phenomena like sea level rise and drought render life in certain areas of the world unlivable, an impact already observable in its early phases, shifts in human population are inevitable.

Drought leads to migration, which leads to refugees, which leads to political, economic and social tensions. All this, Fletcher contends, has led to the rise of populism in Western countries as immigrants can be made scapegoats for crime, increased unemployment and the general deterioration of quality of life.

But it’s not just people who don’t have the time or inclination to worry about and conceptualize all that information who avoid meetings like Tuesday’s, Edens said.

Fletcher’s presentation also touched on the idea that actions taken by those who care about climate change and hope to help reverse it are not always the most impactful choices they could make.

More important than recycling or using energy-saving light bulbs, he said, are the choices to eat a more plant-based diet, having smaller families, and avoiding car and air travel. These restrictions, in Edens’ mind, leave a sour taste in the mouths of those who don’t struggle daily to make ends meet.

“The higher classes, they don’t want to hear it because they don’t want that lifestyle change,” she said. “You’re asking them to stop flying, stop driving, stop having kids, and they just don’t want to hear it.”

More than just realism and pessimism were voiced Tuesday, however. And more

than that lingered in the air after the presentation concluded.

Many in attendance were teachers, like Jessica Sobocinski, who runs the garden program at Hawaii Preparatory Academy. Beyond an opportunity for like-minded people to network and coordinate, she said Fletcher’s program helped the educators there with the “how” of incorporating dense and difficult information into their curriculum.

“How do we introduce this to children in a way that’s not overwhelming but empowering, and can inform their choices as adults?” she said. “Not all kids will be conservationists or farmers, but if they have this understanding they can take it into engineering or computer science. The way they do their work and make their designs is going to be affected by that.”

Chung added to that sentiment, saying climate change education can prove circular. But instead of moving from the community to parents and teachers to kids, it can move in the opposite direction. It can start with the children, who will discuss it with their parents, who can then spread the ideas throughout the community.

Perhaps that can prove the most effective mode of helping people of all economic statuses in all geographic regions of the world to accept and take seriously something that is unpleasant to consider and difficult to understand.

“You guys are here because you know this is a legitimate topic,” Fletcher said. “The problem is the people who are now making decisions in our country and worldwide who do not believe in climate change need to hear this message. But it’s not just scientists who are going to tell them that message. It’s going to be you guys who tell them that message as well.”

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