

Veteran Life's editorial voice blends irreverent humor with clear, accessible information, creating content that feels conversational without sacrificing substance. It speaks to an older, experienced audience by respecting their knowledge while still injecting wit, modern phrasing, and occasional edge to keep the tone engaging rather than overly academic. This balance demonstrates my ability to simplify complex topics, maintain reader attention through personality and humor, and deliver factual content in a way that feels both relatable and memorable.

Fixing the Red Hill Bulk Storage Facility Problem Is No Simple Task



Image via EPA.gov

Currently, 104 million gallons of fuel from WWII's Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility are sitting in the 3 miles of pipelines along Pearl Harbor. In 2021, these pipes ruptured due to human error, causing a massive leak of fuel into Hawaii's drinking water and making thousands ill as a result. Now, the military has finally committed to draining the facility, but experts are concerned that so much could go wrong.

Background on the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility

The initial development of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility was completed in September 1943. It housed 20 vertical storage tanks that were each 20 stories high. These tanks provided the military, mostly the Navy, with fuel during the last half of WWII. Despite their impressive size, these tanks have been notoriously flimsy since their creation, according to military leaders.

[Admiral Chester Nimitz](#), [Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet](#) during WWII, even

stated the following: "We had about 4.5 million barrels of oil out there and all of it was vulnerable to .50-caliber bullets. Had the Japanese destroyed the oil, it would have prolonged the war another two years..."

We don't think we even need to say it, but it's definitely *not* a great look to be a single bullet away from a fiery explosion that could devastate large portions of land and set our military forces back two years—even cost us the war.

Luckily, the fuel facility with a dubious past is finally on track to be decommissioned for good, after which it will be just another part of history.

Past Defueling Efforts

Within the expansive Pearl Harbor fuel pipelines, 104 million gallons of fuel sit dormant, as they have since a leak in 2021. Before the leak, even more fuel remained in the Hawaii storage tanks, and afterward, the military drained several thousand gallons of fuel in an attempt to avoid poisoning the state's tap water any more than it already was.

Since the leak in 2021, the Red Hill Navy defueling effort has gone relatively smoothly. But given that the Navy has a terrible win-loss ratio for essentially poisoning water (like the [USS Nimitz jet fuel water](#) and [USS Abraham Lincoln E. coli water](#) fiascos), we don't expect the next few years of defueling efforts to be without their fair share of hurdles.

The Current Plan

The Navy plans to defuel the pipes of 1 million gallons in fall 2022—a small dent in the greasy grand scheme of things, for sure, but a good step toward progress.

Military officials have stated that they'll be draining each pipeline individually for about a week, and fuel will be moving through the lines for roughly 12 hours each day. This is essentially a test run to see if they'll be able to successfully drain the entirety of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility tanks by their goal date of July 2024.

This initial defueling phase should give us a good idea of if they'll actually be capable of draining the pipes of the remaining 103 million gallons over the next couple of years.

What Experts Are Worried About

The Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii is close to one of the 26 aquifers on Oahu. Not *just* close, though; the facility is only 100 feet above Honolulu's most important aquifer. Officials say the most dangerous aspect of this plan is the potential for fuel to enter the aquifer should it leak.

[Navy Rear Admiral John Wade](#), who's leading the Red Hill Task Force, is well aware of these dangers, and he stated the following in a news conference: "Everything that we've done, every focus of effort for the planning and the rehearsals has been focused on mitigating any chance of a spill..." According to Wade, both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Health have thoroughly examined and approved the military's defueling plans.

If something does go wrong and fuel makes its way into the aquifer, there will be both short- and long-term effects on the population and environment, many of which could be potentially devastating. This is similar to what happened in 2021 when roughly 19,000 gallons leaked into the drinking water, causing thousands of people to fall ill and leaving roughly 100,000 without access to clean drinking water.

... and that was only 19,000 gallons of fuel. If even a portion of the 1 million gallons they're planning to drain leaks, the consequences could be even more far-reaching.

What's Next?

Should this short-term defueling plan go smoothly, the Navy is expected to announce a series of defueling projects over the next year leading to an ultimate emptying of the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in summer 2024.