HCR 254 AND HR 278
REQUESTING AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY
ON ROADSIDE SPRAYING TO ASSESS THE EFFECTS OF ROADSIDE SPRAYING
OF HUMAN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT, AND TO EVALUATE
ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF CONTROLLING ROADSIDE PLANT GROWTH

Statement for
House Committees on
Health
Water, Land Use and Hawaiian Affairs
Public Hearing - April 4, 1991

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HCR 254 and HR 278 would require the Department of Land and Natural
Resources (DINR) to conduct an environmental impact study on roadside
pesticide and herbicide spraying to assess health and environmental effects
and to evaluate alternative methods of controlling roadside plant growth.

Our statement on this bill does not represent an institutional position
of the University of Hawaii.

There is justifiable concern over the safe management of roadside weeds
which must be controlled to assure that roads and road shoulders are kept in
a safe, useable condition. However, the removal of these weeds also
presents a management dilemma. Physical removal with tractor-mounted mowers
and weed whackers is a labor intensive solution. Spraying herbicides and
pesticides is less labor intensive, but potentially more harmful to
pedestrians, the laborers who apply these chemicals, and the environment.

Although we concur with the intent of HCR 254 and HR 278 the suggested
preparation of an environmental impact study by DINR may not be the most
effective means of addressing the concerns. Because a considerable amount
of data is already available on the environmental implications and potential
hazards presented by the various chemicals approved for roadside weed control, it is not clear how much more information, that would be provided by the Environmental Impact Study, would be useful in terms of management decisionmaking. Furthermore, because the impacts of these chemicals will depend so greatly on the specific environments where they are used, it is not likely that DINR could be expected to do the type of detailed, road-by-road evaluation required on a statewide basis. What seems to be needed is better informed and trained weed control staff in the Department of Transportation. We suggest that an alternative approach would be to request OEQC in collaboration with DINR and the Departments of Agriculture and Health, to assist the Department of Transportation in developing guidelines for the use of roadside weed sprays, taking into account the site specific needs of the environments where they are to be used and the potential exposure to the public so as to minimize risks to both.