

Environmentalists, Laie residents split on sewage

Green groups want penalties and the people want to settle

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Environmentalists and Laie residents last night sent state health officials mixed messages on a proposed settlement with the operators of the Laie sewage treatment plant.

Representatives of Hawaii's Thousand Friends, Hui Malama Aina O Laie and other environmentalists challenged the Health Department to impose stricter penalties on Zion Securities Corp. for 1989 water pollution violations at its Laie plant.

They also pushed for a public hearing on the issue to obtain more public testimony. A top state health official,

however, said no such hearing would be held.

Under a proposed Health Department consent order, the company — recently reorganized as Hawaii Reserves Inc. — would pay a \$150,000 cash penalty along with more than \$8 million in environmental projects at the plant.

The settlement stems from 1989 litigation with the state after inspectors discovered illegal discharges into a marsh, streams and into the ocean.

Members of the Laie Community Association, however, said Hawaii Reserves Inc. has done an adequate job of correcting its problems and the association now wants a settlement reached as soon as possible so construction on an expanded Laie wastewater reclamation facility can be completed.

The upgraded and expanded facility, to be completed in December 1994, would allow homes with septic tanks and cesspools to connect with sewage

lines, a city requirement for those building houses or expanding ones.

About 160 people yesterday crammed into Laie Elementary School's tiny cafeteria to attend the Health Department meeting.

Dr. Bruce Anderson, deputy health director, said the department has been working for more than two years with the company to reach an agreement.

"There's millions of dollars involved in the settlement, most of which would be coming back to the community," said Anderson.

He said most of the problems — primarily discharge of partially treated sewage into a nearby marsh — have been resolved.

"At this point in time, substantial actions have been taken to mitigate those problems. Our primary goal is to seek compliance with the laws in the Clean Water Act," he said.

Anderson said the department wants to settle this case as quickly as possible.

He said unless there are substantive, factual comments made which would cause the department to reconsider, it intends to settle this case quickly.

Nevertheless, environmentalist James Anthony asked last night's panel to conduct a public hearing so other environmental groups can testify.

Anthony told the panel while its responses to public comments on the consent order was well-written, it still left many questions.

Anthony also wants the department to forfeit a \$4 million security bond that Zion Securities Corp. posted under an interim agreement last year. The bond would secure the completion of the facility upgrading and expansion project by providing the balance of the \$8 million that the company has spent on the project.

The Health Department had said forfeiture of the bond would mean it would have to take control over construction of the improvements.