



# News Release

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## Help for Hawai'i Island residents using rainwater catchment

*UH Sea Grant awarded USDA funds to provide information and raise awareness on the use of rainwater catchment for rural households*

As many as 60,000 people in the state of Hawai'i depend on rainwater catchment for their potable water needs; many of whom reside in rural communities on Hawai'i Island in underserved populations. Well-designed, installed, and maintained catchment systems can provide clean water for potable and non-potable uses. Poorly maintained or designed systems, however, potentially pose a serious health risk including the introduction of water-borne illness.

The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program (UH Sea Grant) competed successfully for a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant that provides funds for outreach on topics relevant to the health of rural communities. The UH Sea Grant project will focus on best practices in the use of rainwater catchment for residential water needs on Hawai'i Island. Adopting best practices increases the quality and safety of catchment water.

As part of this year-long effort, UH Sea Grant and its partners will hold nine (9) free informational workshops across the island for residents to learn more about rainwater catchment operations, and maintenance and best practices to improve safety. Water testing kits and instructions will be provided free of charge to those attending the workshops. The free workshops will be held in neighborhoods and communities throughout Hawai'i Island beginning in March 2015.

Residents using water catchment will also have the opportunity to have their voices heard by giving anonymous feedback, including surveys that will inform future UH Sea Grant outreach in this area, which will be shared with elected officials and other decision-makers.

Two additional workshops will be held for government officials, civil servants, community groups, and health care providers to increase awareness about rainwater catchment issues.

Project leader Dr. Mary J. Donohue explains, "Our goal is to enable rural residents on Hawai'i Island dependent on rainwater catchment to improve the quality of their water supply through recognizing and addressing problems, thereby increasing access to safe, fresh water. We are committed to helping communities make informed decisions concerning their catchment systems, provide water testing kits to monitor water quality, and measure changes in rainwater catchment knowledge, actions, behaviors, and practices.

Ms. Chantal Chung, a UH Sea Grant extension staff member on Hawai'i Island, who herself grew up using rainwater catchment in South Kona, was a driving force in developing the project.

She said "Our extension program activities engage communities on multiple levels to support sustainable households, which support sustainable communities, which support sustainable islands, which support a sustainable archipelago."

UH Sea Grant hopes to expand the effort regionally to other Hawaiian Islands and U.S. island territories. Dr. Darren Okimoto, UH Sea Grant Extension Leader, remarked "We look forward to engaging stakeholders on Hawai'i Island on this timely project and exploring ways in which we can expand the project to other parts of the state and Pacific region."

The project is possible because of the collaboration of numerous organizations and individuals including the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture program, University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR), Na Maka O Papahānaumokuākea, the Sustainable Living Institute of Maui, and a partnership with the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association, the nation's premier non-profit promoting the safe and effective use of rainwater catchment worldwide, among other partners.

More information on the free water catchment workshops and additional project details are available at the website: [hawaiirain.org](http://hawaiirain.org), by emailing [cechung@hawaii.edu](mailto:cechung@hawaii.edu), or calling (808) 329-2861.

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*The University of Hawai'i Sea Grant College Program is part of the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's prestigious School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology. It supports an innovative program of research, education and extension services directed to the improved understanding and stewardship of coastal and marine resources of the state, region and nation. Science serving Hawai'i and the Pacific for over 45 years.*