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Coast guardians

UH's Sea Grant program focuses on sustainability in the new decade

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With a new decade just begun, the folks at the University of Hawai'i Sea Grant program want to focus their research efforts to build what they call "coastal sustainability and resiliency."

Program administrators believe that coastal communities are more vulnerable than ever before, because of increasing climate-related environmental changes.

To navigate this critical juncture, Sea Grant plans to concentrate for the next five years on five key areas:

- Coastal health
- Sustainable coastal development
- Safe and sustainable food supply
- Coastal hazard resiliency
- Sustainable coastal tourism

It has also created four new "centers of excellence" to sharpen its focus on climate problems, aquaculture, tourism and education. Sea Grant has a fifth center, established in 2004, that tackles building design.

The emphasis on the coastal environment and sustainable local food supply is needed because the world, and certainly Hawai'i, must make dramatic changes, said Gordon Grau, director of Sea Grant.

"The world we need to create for our grandchildren will need to be as different as ours was from our grandparents' world," he said. "It is absolutely essential. We have a responsibility to future generations — that they can have a quality of life that is at least as good as our own."

Sea Grant emphasizes education, hands-on learning experiences and the dissemination of information, in the form of guidebooks, presentations and community partnerships, that help communities have the background needed to make sustainable choices. On Kaua'i, UH Sea Grant is working with public agencies to update the county's Shoreline Setback and Coastal Protection Ordinance.

On O'ahu, Sea Grant partners with several organizations in Waikiki to focus on beach stewardship; supports the Center for Marine Science Education; and coordinates Mauka Watch in partnership with Mālama Maunaloa, a community-based program in East O'ahu aimed at controlling marine pollution.

Sea Grant has a long-standing commitment to a better understanding of conservation and use of coastal resources, Grau said. The program, founded in 1968, is part of a national network of 32 similar university-based programs that network with policymakers, businesses and the public.

"Our job is to connect all these resources to issues, challenges and opportunities that face our local communities," he said.

The best solution is to try and not have a problem in the first place, Grau said.

"From the point of view of coastal health, most of the problems we have in coastal waters have to do with what we are doing on land," he said. "If we don't get the way we live on land correct, then we are always going to be cleaning up the mess we make."

Additional Facts

FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about the University of Hawai'i Sea Grant program's environmental Centers of Excellence, publications and services, go to www.soest.hawaii.edu/seagrant
