

Hawaii Aloha by HPMA Executive Director Robert Fung

It is indeed an honor to be writing my first Hawaii state report as the new Executive Director of HPMA! After 21 years with Aloha Petroleum, I'm now officially retired from the company. I look forward to working with HPMA President Kimo Haynes, the executive committee and the entire HPMA board, WPMA CEO Gene Inglesby and the hard-working WPMA staff, and all the great WPMA state executives! I'm especially humbled by the opportunity to join this elite group of state executives — I know I've got a lot to learn, but I'm comforted to know that I've got such collaborative and seasoned leaders to learn from.

Hawaii Re-Opens to Tourism

Good news! The tourism industry in Hawaii had been shut down since the end of March, but the State reopened to domestic trans-pacific travelers as of October 15th and to Japanese travelers on November 6th. During the shutdown, Hawaii imposed a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all visitors. Now, you can bypass the state's 14-day quarantine (including children who are 5 years or older), provided you can show written proof of a negative NAAT test for COVID-19 (taken no earlier than three days prior to travel) from a state-approved testing partner. The state's new pre-travel testing plan was first announced in June, and was originally going to launch on August 1st, before being pushed back to September 1st and then Oct. 1st, before finally settling on October 15th.

In the first 12 days after the state re-opened, almost 95,000 visitors arrived in Hawaii. Out of the total, 10,000 had to self-quarantine for 14 days because they did not pre-test or were tested by a non-approved testing agency. Currently, the state has 17 approved testing agencies (including CVS and Walgreens). Please be sure you use one of the approved testing sites if you plan to visit Hawaii soon. For the complete list of approved testing sites, check out <https://hawaiicovid19.com/travel-partners>.

Unfortunately, the Governor allowed each of the 4 county mayors to "opt out" of the state's pre-testing program, and as a result, there is no unified statewide policy for allowing visitors to each of the Hawaiian Islands. Each island has different requirements after you arrive in Hawaii. If you travel to the island of Oahu, Honolulu County randomly requires a second test four days after arrival for roughly 10% of the visitors. Oahu remains in Tier 2 of a 4-tiered reopening plan - group gatherings are limited to 5 non-household members, and restaurants and retail shops must reduce their capacity to 25% or 50% depending on the type of business. Short-term vacation rentals have also re-opened.

Maui and Kauai islands ask travelers to volunteer to take a second test from 48 to 72 hours after they arrive. If you volunteer to take a second test, Maui and Kauai will bribe you with coupons or other freebies to use during your visit. If you plan on traveling to Hawaii Island, you are required to also take a free county-administered COVID-19 antigen test upon arrival to Hawaii Island. Unfortunately, Lanai (population of 2,800) is currently closed due to a local outbreak, which has been traced to community spread.

Now that tourism has re-opened in Hawaii, this may be the best time for a vacation – so choose your favorite island(s), get tested and visit! Most of the hotels, beaches, hiking trails, sight-seeing attractions, restaurants, retail stores, and golf courses have re-opened. However, bars and nightclubs remain closed. It is unlikely you will ever see traffic so light, and the beaches and hiking trails this empty again! But please remember that face masks are mandatory in all public spaces in Hawaii, except when swimming and exercising.

COVID-19 Counts Low but Hawaii Economy Crippled

As I write this article, Hawaii reported 41 new coronavirus infections statewide, and a positivity rate of 2%, bringing the total number of cases since the start of the pandemic to 14,834, with 213 deaths due to COVID-19. Of the total infections statewide, roughly 20% are considered active cases, and roughly 80% classified by health officials as recovered and "released from isolation." As you can see, Hawaii has one of the lowest COVID-19 case rates and lowest transmission rates of any state in the nation. Thankfully, we will continue to flatten the curve and get back to normal and revive the state's dying economy.

Whether this will be soon enough for the small mom and pops from going out of business remains to be seen. 2020 started off in Hawaii with an economic resurgence, and the lowest unemployment rate in the country. Unemployment is now in the double digits, and the global pandemic has seriously hurt the tourism industry in Hawaii, including transportation, retail, and food service. Unfortunately, Hawaii had the highest unemployment rate in the nation in September at 15.1%. As with most states, only the construction industry avoided job losses. Most economists don't see an economic recovery in Hawaii until mid-to-late 2021.

Legislative 2020 Recap and 2021 Preview

The 2020 Hawaii legislative session was shut down in March. Although originally scheduled to adjourn on May 7th, the Hawaii Legislature finally reconvened on June 22nd and ended up adjourning on July 10th. With such an abbreviated legislative session, there was simply not enough time for the Legislature to do its business, and almost all of the bills introduced in 2020 did not pass.

For 2021, I expect to see many of the same 2020 bills introduced again – bills related to renewable energy, climate change and sea level rise, tax surcharges and increases, EV mandates and the planned phase out of fossil fuel vehicles, increases to minimum wage and equal pay, restrictions on tobacco products and e-cigs, and further restrictions to retail store sales and liquor laws.

Climate Change Litigation

During the pandemic, the trial lawyers kept busy, and both Honolulu and Maui Counties recently filed lawsuits against the big oil companies seeking compensation and other damages related to climate change problems caused by fossil fuels. Honolulu and Maui join at least 20 other states, counties and local governments in filing similar climate change lawsuits against the big oil companies for rising costs and related impacts to the environment. These lawsuits generally follow the tobacco litigation from the 1990's. But as far as I know, nobody ever smoked or inhaled fossil fuels, but I guess we are addicted to our cars!

The complaints allege the oil companies (among them Chevron, Shell, BP and Exxon Mobil) knew the harm they were causing to the environment since the 1950's but covered it up. Not only will they have to prove the cover-up, but Maui County must somehow show that 16 of the named oil company defendants – and Honolulu County must somehow show that 6 of the named oil company defendants – caused the climate change damages in Hawaii, without even doing business in Hawaii!!!

Upcoming Event - HPMA Golf Tournament at Oahu Country Club

Unfortunately, the HPMA golf tournament originally planned for November 2, 2020 was postponed due to the pandemic – the tournament is now rescheduled to March 15, 2021. The venue remains at Oahu Country Club, which was founded over 100 years ago. Known as the “Grand Dame” of Hawaii golf courses, it's bordered by a lush forest on three sides, and an ocean view on the fourth side. As usual, we will have great prizes, delicious food and drinks. Hope to see you all there!