

Maui County Council Passes Tobacco-free Beaches and Parks Bill

For Immediate Release

April 22, 2014

Maui environmental organizations had an extra special reason to celebrate Earth Day this year, as a bill banning tobacco use at all Maui County parks, beaches and recreational facilities passed the final Council vote.

"Cigarette butts are pervasive, toxic and polluting our oceans and beaches. We are so excited that our county leaders listened and that our efforts payed off!" exclaimed Lauren Campbell, Conservation Manager at Pacific Whale Foundation.

Cigarette butts are the most commonly littered piece of trash in the environment, with an estimated 4.2 trillion butts littered worldwide each year. To date, nearly 200 municipalities across the U.S. have passed similar policies banning smoking in parks and on beaches, including New York City, Los Angeles and Seattle.

Sonya Neiss, Maui Coordinator for the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Hawai'i, notes, "an increasing number of cities and states are recognizing the need to take action against the environmental and public health impacts of smoking. We are glad Maui could join the ranks!"

Hawai'i Island passed similar legislation in 2008, and Honolulu County's smoke-free beaches and parks ban went into effect January 2014.

The passage of the Maui bill was exceptionally fast, with only 42 days separating its introduction and final vote. Andrew O'Riordan, Volunteer Coordinator of Surfrider Maui and a teacher at Maui Preparatory Academy, attributes this feat largely to the involvement of Maui high school students.

"Gina Marzo and the other members of Maui District Student Council Organization (MDSCO) spent weekends picking up butts, provided testimony and overall were really integral to the bill's passage. I am extremely proud of their effort."

After the bill's passage, Council Members were in for an even bigger surprise, as a life-sized, bikini clad mannequin lay sunning herself outside the County Building on a bed of 25,055 cigarette butts.

"These cigarette butts are the result of beach and park cleanups throughout Maui County," says Neiss. "It's sad that our environment has become a giant ashtray".

In addition to serving as a Public Service Announcement, the display provided the backdrop for celebrating both the passage of the bill, as well as Earth Day.

"The bill comes on the heels of a nationwide movement concerned with health and environmental pollutants, which is why it is so fitting that today is Earth Day," said Council Member Don Guzman who originally introduced the bill.

Council Members honored the efforts of the various environmental and public health organizations who championed the bill in a small ceremony on the lawn of the County Building. Each organization was presented with a native plant.

While applauding their hard work, organizations remind the public that the passage of the bill represents only the first step towards ridding Maui's beaches and parks of cigarette butts.

"The bill's success hinges on public outreach and education," says Campbell, "Enforcement will be largely community-based, so now the real work starts!"

Coalition for a Tobacco Free Hawai'i, Surfrider Maui, Pacific Whale Foundation, Sierra Club, Malama Maui Nui, B.E.A.C.H. and additional partner organizations send a sincere thank you to Council Member Don Guzman for introducing the bill, as well as Council Members Elle Cochran, Mike Victorino and Don Couch for their continued support. The organizations are also indebted to the the hundreds of individual testifiers who supported this bill.