

# Kualoa pellets: What's a poor

Isle scientists think they've solved the droppings mystery

By Peter Wagner  
Star-Bulletin

Hundreds of pint-sized pellets continue to wash ashore at Kualoa Regional Park, closed to swimmers for the past two weeks because of possible contamination.

But while health officials have yet to find out what the material is, one marine biologist thinks the sea has coughed up a harmless collection of turtle droppings.

"It certainly looks to me to be consistent with the sea turtle pellets I've

picked up at other places," said George Balazs, a sea turtle specialist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration who recently examined some of the smelly flotsam. Balazs found codium, a type of algae common in turtles' diets, in the fecal matter.

If he is right, the public hazards appear slight.

Roger Fujioka of the University of Hawaii Water Resource Research Center said the feces of sea turtles, which are vegetable-eating reptiles, contain lower concentrations of bacteria than humans or warm-blooded animals.

"If it came from turtles, it's of less significance than if it came from humans or pigs," Fujioka said.

Meanwhile, however, investigators at the state Department of Health are keeping a wary eye on the situation. Preliminary studies turned up five

## turtle to do?

parasites in the material, one of which resembles a parasite that causes amoebic dysentery in humans. Dr. Robert Desowitz, who specializes in human parasitology at the University of Hawaii's tropical medicine branch, says the parasite could also prove harmless. "It's up in the air," Desowitz said. "But if indeed these are turtle droppings, the parasites probably don't constitute a significant danger to humans."

Health officials have been monitoring the debris at Kualoa since July 6, collecting up to 400 pellets in a single day. The beach between Kualoa Point and the old sugar mill was closed Aug. 11.

Eugene Akazawa of the water quality monitoring branch said bacteria counts in the water have been low. Nevertheless, samples of the drop-

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Dr. Robert Desowitz  
UH tropical medicine branch

pings were recently sent to a U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory in Iowa for identification.

"It could be turtles, but we're not closing the case until we know for sure," Akazawa said.

# HAWAII

# Tests point to probable turtle origin

By Barbara Hastings  
Advertiser Science Writer

The signs warning of polluted water are still up at Kualoa Regional Park, but a state health official says the feces washing up, while unpleasant, "should not hold too much of a human health hazard."

Tests done by a Mainland laboratory on the fecal contamination at the

Windward Oahu park showed that it was "non-human and non-domestic," said Bruce Anderson, deputy health director. That means it's not from cats, dogs, pigs, cattle or horses. "The data point to marine animals; turtles are most likely," he said.

Generally, any disease-causing viruses or bacteria in any species preys only on that species, Anderson said. That means if it's a human bacteria, it

usually attacks only a human host. Turtle germs tend to attack turtles. There are exceptions, Anderson said, but the general rule is that these pathogens are host-specific.

The fecal material has been washing up at Kualoa for several weeks, causing the state to post warning signs Aug. 11.

"It's still unclear why these are appearing now and were not reported

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## for feces in Kualoa waters

before," Anderson said. He said he talked with people long familiar with the area and they couldn't recall this type of contamination before. It might be a shift in the migratory patterns of the green sea turtle, Anderson said.

George Balazs, a green sea turtle specialist with the federal NOAA Fisheries, said last month he was fairly certain the feces were from turtles. At the time, Balazs said he, too,

wondered why the sudden influx of feces at Kualoa.

Balazs said Kaneohe Bay is the preferred habitat for many of the turtles, but a tumor-causing disease is spreading among the animals. Balazs said it's possible that the tumors, causing obstructed vision and swimming abilities, are causing a change in migration patterns.