

CONSUMER SPOTLIGHT

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE & CONSUMER AFFAIRS
DIVISION OF CONSUMER ADVOCACY



Executive Director's Message

By: Dean Nishina



March 1st kicked off National Consumer Protection Week. Due to COVID-19, the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs hosted a Virtual Consumer Fair so it looked different this year. There was a virtual workshop every day of the week, March 1-5. If you missed it, recordings of each

webinar will be available on the DCCA website soon.

This newsletter includes a description of a smart home and some of the unexpected benefits of the smart home, which include saving money. Also featured is an article on Kauai Island Utility Cooperative's West Kauai Energy Project that has received national attention for its integration of pump storage hydropower with large-scale solar power.

The Consumer Advocate provides more COVID-19 related updates and encourages consumers to contact their utility for payment arrangements and keep an eye out for bill assistance programs. Lastly, a new docket has been opened to review Hawaiian Electric interconnection process and transition plans for the future of fossil fuel plants.

WHAT IS A SMART HOME?

Smart home is the term used for residences that use technology (like WiFi and Bluetooth) to enable devices to "talk" to each other and be managed on the go.

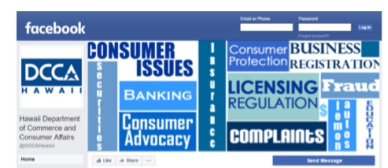
Smart homes can vary from just a few connected devices to whole-home automation. Lighting, security, appliances, cameras, thermostats and even power outlets can be integrated in a smart home.

Smart home devices can be controlled remotely via a smartphone, tablet, voice assistant or specialized smart home hub.



In this issue:

- Smart Homes and Unexpected Benefits
- KIUC - West Kauai Energy Project
- COVID-19 Utility Update
- PUC Opens Docket No. 2021-0024



us!

www.facebook.com/DCCAHawaii

Kauai Island Utility Cooperative receives national attention for The West Kauai Energy Project



Unexpected Benefits of the Smart Home

Save money:

Maximize energy efficiency, improve appliance functionality, catch major problems before they arise, lower home insurance and increase home value.

Greater convenience:

Manage all devices from one place, control devices through voice commands and automate daily needs.

Peace of mind:

Protect belongings, keep an eye on your kids, pets and aging parents and remotely monitor smoke, CO and water.

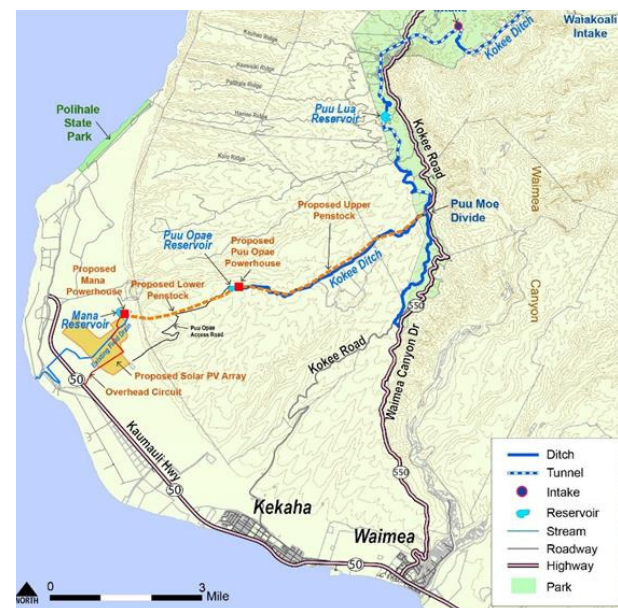
Kauai Island Utility Cooperative (KIUC) signed agreements with The AES Corporation (AES) for the development, construction, and operation of the solar pumped storage hydro project, also known as the West Kaua'i Energy Project (WKEP).

WKEP will provide renewable energy via a combination of large scale solar, pumped hydro storage, and battery storage to enable use of the renewable energy when needed. In addition, irrigation water will be delivered to support diversified agriculture on state-owned lands.

"This project's integration of pump storage hydropower with large-scale solar power is unique in the energy industry," KIUC President and CEO David Bissell said in a statement. "Upon completion, the facility will operate at a cost that will benefit KIUC's members for decades." KIUC says the project will offset the use of 8.5 million gallons of fossil fuels annually, potentially saving customers more than \$170 million over the 25-year power purchase agreement, and will supply irrigation water delivery to support diversified agriculture on state lands.

The project, the third renewable collaboration between KIUC and AES, is up for regulatory approval. The Consumer Advocate is engaged in the discussion and is submitting information requests to KIUC to aid in a recommendation to the Commission regarding whether the application should be approved or denied. WKEP's location and layout is shown on the map to the right. The project site is located approximately 4 miles north of the town of Kekaha and 6 miles northwest of the town of Waimea.

(Docket No. 2020-0218)



PUC Docket Numbers are included in these articles for further, in depth reading. PUC public filings are accessible online via the PUC's Document Management System (DMS). Visit: <http://dms.puc.hawaii.gov/dms>



COVID-19 Utility Update

The Consumer Advocate wants to remind customers that the suspension of termination or disconnection of regulated utility services due to non-payment and/or assessment of other charges ends March 31, 2021. We encourage customers to contact their utility to work out payment arrangements and continue paying their bills to the extent possible during this time.

If you've fallen behind on utility bills or are struggling to make the payments each month, then you may be eligible for programs available from utility company or your State. There has been ongoing work across the nation and in Hawaii to develop bill assistance programs.

Gov. David Ige announced in early February that the latest funds from the December stimulus package will provide assistance to help residents with payments for rent and utility bills.

Programs such as the Aloha United Way's COVID-19 Rent & Utility Assistance Program and Hawaii Bill Assistance Program provide financial relief but have quickly reached capacity.

Federal programs in the works include the Emergency Broadband Benefit - a program to help U.S. households that are struggling to pay for internet service during the pandemic provides a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for those on Tribal lands.

Consumers should work with utility service providers and be on the lookout for opportunities for bill assistance.

PUC OPENS DOCKET NO. 2021-0024 TO REVIEW HAWAIIAN ELECTRIC INTERCONNECTION PROCESS AND TRANSITION PLANS FOR RETIREMENT OF FOSSIL FUEL POWER PLANTS

The Commission's primary objective with this docket is to transparently review and track the status of Hawaiian Electric's current projects, identify near-term interconnection process improvements to facilitate renewable projects under development, and elicit the best solutions to ensure a cost-effective retirement of the AES coal plant on Oahu, Kahului Plant, and other fossil fuel power plants, as needed.

Hawaiian Electric will be filing an initial status update on current project timelines, interconnection delays, and fossil fuel power plant transition plans. They will also file the Kahului Plant Transition Plan as Maui Electric plans to retire its Kahului Plant in 2023.

By March 5, 2021, Hawaiian Electric will file an update on the current status and timelines for all projects in the community renewables (CBRE) program and the projects resulting from recent competitive procurements.

Upcoming Dates of Interest

- **March 1-5, 2021: National Consumer Protection Week**
(The DCCA and USPS held a virtual workshop every day of the week. Recordings will soon be available for viewing.)
- **March 16, 2021: Public Hearing**
(For approval to relocate a 46 kilovolt overhead transmission line along Salt Lake Boulevard on Oahu. Visit the DCA website for more details.)
- **March 26, 2021:** Prince Jonah Kuhio Kalanianaʻole Day (State holiday, our office will be closed)

MYTH NO. 1
Smart meters
are less accurate
than analog
meters.

MYTHS VS. FACTS: THE TRUTH ABOUT SMART METERS

TRUTH: Smart meters are rigorously tested for accuracy even before they leave the manufacturing plant.

TRUTH: Some public service commissions require meter manufacturers to supply test results to prove that their smart meters generate on-the-mark measurements. All meter manufacturers must follow performance standards set by the American National Standards Institute.

TRUTH: Prior to installation, utilities repeatedly perform accuracy tests, often side-by-side with analog meters.

STAY TUNED FOR MORE MYTHS VS. FACTS

Consumer Spotlight

Subscribe to DCA's newsletter

Subscribe on our website at cca.hawaii.gov/dca/subscribe.

We also welcome feedback and story ideas. Email us at dca@dcca.hawaii.gov.

Contact Us

Division of Consumer Advocacy

P.O. Box 541 Honolulu, HI 96809

Phone: (808) 586-2800

Fax: (808) 586-2780

E-mail: dca@dcca.hawaii.gov

Web Address: dcca.hawaii.gov/dca

Also Visit

Public Utilities Commission (PUC)

465 South King St., Rm. 103

Honolulu, HI 96813

Phone: (808) 586-2020

Fax: (808) 586-2066

E-mail: puc@hawaii.gov

Web Address: puc.hawaii.gov

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

445 12th St., SW

Washington, DC 20554

Toll-Free: 1-888-225-5322

E-mail: fccinfo@fcc.gov

Web Address:

www.fcc.gov/consumers

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)

888 First St., NE

Washington, DC 20426

Toll-Free: 1-866-208-3372

E-mail: customer@ferc.gov

Web Address: www.ferc.gov