



Kihei Community Association

"e malama pono"...dedicated to protecting,
sustaining and enhancing our 'āina, kai and 'ohana

KIHEI COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT
ADDRESSING AIR QUALITY RESULTING FROM CANE BURNING
AUGUST, 2015

The Kihei Community Association (KCA) is concerned about the quality of air in South Maui caused by the harvesting of sugar cane by burning. In south Maui sugar cane fields are adjacent to many existing and proposed houses, schools, and businesses. The present method of harvesting is primarily the burning of the mature sugar cane. The smoke from the burning is a major nuisance at least, and at worst, a health hazard. The KCA position on the harvesting of sugar cane is as follows:

1. Advocate that harvesting of sugar cane be done without burning. Green harvesting is practiced in other parts of the world and should be used here as the general practice.
2. Advocate the use of crops other than sugar cane that can be harvested without burning.
3. Request that the sugar company identify the cane fields that are too rocky and have too much slope to allow for green harvesting of the cane. Request that they consider these fields for alternative agriculture or remedial work.
4. Request that the sugar company identify the additional costs of green harvesting of sugar cane or of alternative crops. Promote a plan to offset these additional costs to a limited extent with additional subsidies, property entitlements, or the establishment of air quality improvement districts.
5. Advocate that those presently employed in the production of sugar, shall not be unduly disadvantaged by any change in sugar cane harvesting or in growing alternate crops.

Facts and assumptions

1. Harvesting sugar cane by burning has caused a variety of serious medical complaints. These complaints include but are not limited to asthma, allergies, stinging eyes, and shortness of breath, genotoxicity in cane field workers, and cancer. When burned, sugar cane releases a number of pollutants and toxins. This includes particulate matter, hydrocarbons, carbon monoxide, and volatile organic compounds. None of these substances are desirable.
2. Cane burning could cause a reduction of tourists to south Maui due to suspected health issues and major nuisance concerns. It is noted that the primary industry in Maui is tourism. However, if we lose the green sugar cane field in the central valley this could cause a reduction of tourists if there is a proliferation of dust and visual blight.

3. Employment in sugar production in Maui is very important to the community. It is reported that there are approximately 800 jobs related to the cane business.
4. Many in the community are concerned about the loss of sugar cane plants. The cane fields keep the arid part of Maui green and help reduce windblown dust.
5. Cane burning can result in a large volume of ash. This ash in South Maui covers lawns, cars, housing, swimming pools, beaches and the surface of the near shore ocean waters. The resulting ash is considered by many as very dirty. Ash from lawns and sidewalks is tracked onto household floors and carpets, into businesses and it adds to the house cleaning work and the cost of house and business maintenance.
6. Agricultural burning of cane is believed to be unnecessary from both a technical and economic standpoint. It has been reported that both New Zealand and Australia harvest sugar cane without burning. The wage structure in both these countries is similar to Hawaii. Apparently these countries can green harvest sugar cane and stay fiscally viable.
7. Green harvesting is reported by the sugar company to cost more than harvesting cane by burning. The sugar company also states that they cannot green harvest more acreage due to the slopes and rocky soil. The additional cost for green harvesting has not been identified or confirmed. There is no data on effect of employment differences between green harvesting and harvesting by burning. The amount of green harvesting that could be done by percentage of fields has not been publicly identified.
8. It is our understanding that sugar production is already subsidized by the federal government to some extent. To promote tourism, the state could consider providing some funding for the change from harvesting cane by burning to green harvesting.
9. In 1971, the Director of the Department of Health ordered sugar plantations “to abate all burning of cane” because of the belief of health hazards. To date nothing has changed from the practices in 1971.