

PAPAHĀNAUMOKUĀKEA



PRESS RELEASE

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SHIP RETURNS FROM PAPAĀNAUMOKUĀKEA LOADED WITH MARINE DEBRIS

(Honolulu, HI) With virtually no room on deck to spare, NOAA Ship *Oscar Elton Sette* returned to port in Honolulu on Sept. 29, 2009 loaded with over 40 tons of marine debris collected from the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. During the 30-day mission to the Monument a crew of 17 scientists from NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and Joint Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Research (JIMAR), with specialized dive training, removed underwater marine debris at Maro Reef, Pearl and Hermes Atoll and Kure Atoll. Collected debris along beaches and shores of Laysan Island, Lisianski Island, Pearl and Hermes Atoll, and Kure Atoll was also removed to reduce shoreline entanglement risk for protected species such as the endangered Hawaiian monk seal. During these removal efforts, divers carefully and painstakingly removed derelict nets from coral reefs and hauled them on board the deck of the *Sette* for safe storage and transport to O‘ahu. Expedition leader and Chief Scientist Kyle Koyanagi of NOAA Fisheries Service said virtually every available portion of the ship’s deck was used to stack debris for transport back to Pearl Harbor. Koyanagi said, “This project is unique due to federal, state and private organizations all working together toward a common goal. It’s a project that provides instant gratification, as removing the derelict fishing gear from the shallow coral reef environments has immediate positive effects.”

This effort is the first of two expeditions this calendar year directed towards derelict fishing gear removal. The second cruise will be going out in early October. This removal effort has been ongoing since 1996 with funding and assistance from the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, the NOAA Marine Debris Program, NOAA Fisheries Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. More than 700 tons of derelict fishing gear has been removed from the reefs and shorelines of the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. The fishing nets, net fragments, fishing lines, rope and other derelict fishing gear pose not only a serious entanglement hazard to marine life, but are also a navigation hazard, damage habitat and may carry in alien species from outside areas.

More

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Since 2002, all derelict nets removed from the NWHI have been used to create electricity in the nation's first *Nets to Energy* program. This is a public-private partnership of more than 12 different organizations, businesses and agencies. So far the nets removed from the NWHI have created enough energy to power 245 homes in Hawai'i each year. The debris was offloaded on Sept. 30th and transported to Schnitzer Steel Hawai'i Corporation to be cut into manageable portions for incineration and power production by Covanta H-Power.

Papahānaumokuākea is cooperatively managed to ensure ecological integrity and achieve strong, long-term protection and perpetuation of Northwestern Hawaiian Island ecosystems, Native Hawaiian culture, and heritage resources for current and future generations. Three co-trustees – the Department of Commerce, Department of the Interior, and State of Hawai'i – joined by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, protect this special place, which is now being considered for inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. For more information, please visit

www.papahanaumokuakea.gov

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