

Big Island Geothermal Plant Cited

Associated Press

HILO, Hawaii (AP) — A geothermal plant on the Big Island has been cited by the Environmental Protection Agency for 14 violations, accused of failing to properly maintain and monitor its operations.

The Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported Tuesday (<http://bit.ly/1ijkByD> [1]) that 10 of the violations had already been corrected as of 2010.

A spokesman for the geothermal plant, Puna Geothermal Venture, said the company disagrees with the EPA's findings but can't yet comment more specifically.

"We are working on a response to the report," said Mike Kaleikini, the plant's senior director of Hawaiian affairs. "Our ongoing commitment is to be above and beyond the regulatory requirements."

The EPA said in a letter to the plant last month that it had failed to take some necessary steps to prevent releases, but generally operated the facility well.

The agency said the plant doesn't always follow its schedules for maintaining and testing its geothermal wells.

The agency's findings came from an August inspection. The EPA said the plant's monitoring habits may not detect small leaks around well casings.

"Thus, the (monitoring program) provides almost no assurance that a casing leak will be detected in the early stage of a failure," the EPA said in its report.

The agency said it also found no records of certain equipment being recalibrated even though it should be done monthly.

When asked whether the report supports the notion that the plant tries to go above minimum requirements, Kaleikini said: "They (the EPA) can disagree. They are the regulatory agency but that's our position."

The plant has until the end of June to respond to the accusations.

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[1] <http://bit.ly/1ijkByD>

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