"The Great Hawaii Molasses Spill of 2013"

The Great Hawaii Molasses Spill refers to a discharge of 235,000 gallons of black strap molasses into Honolulu Harbor in September 2013. The spill was discovered on 9 September 2013. It was caused by a faulty pipe, for which the shipping company Matson Navigation Co. has taken responsibility. Molasses is an unregulated product, and neither Matson nor government officials had a contingency plan to respond to a molasses spill. Divers in the harbor area reported that all sea life was killed by the molasses, which instantly sank to the bottom of the harbor. Various species of coral were injured or killed, many marine crustaceans suffocated and died, and over 26,000 fish perished. The most likely causes for the extensive death to marine life include low oxygen, hydrogen sulfide poisoning, and osmotic shock associated with high sucrose concentration. The water column recovered quickly (~10 days) due to the bacterial respiration of sucrose as well as tidal flushing. Fish and non-sessile invertebrate populations will return to pre-spill levels via natural recruitment processes. The return of the sessile invertebrate populations (e.g., corals) could be mediated by performing “transplants.” This student points to the need for a comprehensive baseline dataset for Honolulu and adjacent areas.

Thursday December 4, 2014 3:00 p.m. MSB 100