

Saving Coral

E ho'omau i ke ko'a

Corals are an essential part of life in Hawai'i. They support an abundance of life on the reef, protect our homes and businesses from storm events, and provide amazing beauty for people to enjoy snorkeling and diving. Corals are currently under major threat due to rising ocean temperatures, sea level rise, pollution, and unsustainable fishing practices.

The Main Hawaiian Islands have 410,000 acres of living reef, supporting more than 7,000 species of marine plants and animals. Of those species, 25% are endemic, found only in Hawai'i. Coral bleaching used to be a rare occurrence in Hawai'i, but we have now experienced three major bleaching events in the past few years, resulting in major die-offs of corals throughout the state. Reefs experienced mortality rates of 10-50%. While warm ocean temperatures are the direct cause of bleaching, we can all take steps to minimize human impacts and help save our reefs.

Interacting with natural resources responsibly means minimizing our impact on the environment. The Coral Pledge aims to highlight actions that can be taken to lessen the compounding threats to corals. These simple actions can be taken to reduce stressors to corals including physical harm, sedimentation, coastal water pollution such as fuels, fertilizers, detergent, or other contaminants that degrade water quality. By following and promoting the practices outlined below, you are committing to help conserve our coral reefs.

Thank you for joining the DLNR Division of Aquatic Resources in the stewardship of our treasured coral reefs. Your commitment to conservation of our marine environments will set a standard for all marine resource users. We look forward to expanding this community of environmental leaders, working together to protect the very environments that sustain our lives and livelihoods in Hawai'i. Let's take care of our reefs together so we can continue to enjoy them for generations to come.

Industry Coral Pledge

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Actions we voluntarily commit to for the protection our reefs:

1) Explain to visitors that a coral bleaching event is occurring in Hawai'i and how they can help corals during this time.

2) Do not touch, kick, rest, or stand on coral:

- Take guests to deeper locations to avoid physical reef disturbance.
- Prohibit guests from swimming into areas where the water depth is less than 5 feet.
- Avoid touching anything with fins, and be aware of stirring up sediment.
- Remind all visitors to never touch or step on the bottom.

3) Promote the use of sun-protective clothing to reduce sunscreen use, use reef safe alternatives, avoid sunscreens containing oxybenzone or octinoxate.

4) Establish a no take/no feeding policy for all marine life:

- Do not feed fish. Fish feeding fills up key herbivores, preventing them from doing their job on the reef, and can alter fish population structure.
- Remind visitors of rules prohibiting take of marine life, shells, sand, and coral from Marine Life Conservation Districts, and encourage them to practice this same behavior at all sites they visit.
- Avoid excessive noise which can disturb marine ecosystems, displace key species, and/or change their behaviors in ways that alter their ecosystem services.

5) Conduct environmental awareness briefings and include reminders not to touch coral during every briefing:

- Display more reef-safe guidance in shops and on websites.
- Require all staff to adhere to the principles of this pledge.
- Request operators and staff to report bleaching to DAR at hawaiicoral.org.
- Encourage operators and staff to participate in reef monitoring programs, like Eyes of the Reef (eorhawaii.org).

6) Reduce waste and properly dispose of trash or litter:

- Encourage all guests to use the boat's head prior to entering the water.
- Use biodegradable toilet paper and phosphate-free cleaning products, and minimize their entry into the marine environment wherever possible.
- Do not wash dishes at anchor or discard any food scraps
- Petroleum products in the bilge should be broken down with biodegradable detergents and pumped into vessel storage containers on board, then disposed of at a recycling depot on shore.

7) Never drop anchor on coral:

- Use only available, legally installed day-use moorings and encourage all other boaters to do the same; help non-commercial boaters locate available moorings.
- Carry enough chain and line to anchor in the appropriate depth.
- Always check the area before anchoring.
- Anchor in sand away from live coral and be sure your chain is clear of coral.
- If anchor gets stuck, do not yank it. Snorkel or dive to release.

8) Stagger visitation of commercial tours:

- Where possible, all commercial vessels should stagger activities throughout their stay, to limit the number of passengers at locations and avoid overcrowding. This includes scuba diving, snorkel tours and other in-water activities.